THE EMPRESS:

A NOVEL,

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THE EMPRESS:

A NOVEL,

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE EMPRESS.

CHAPTER I.

"But—no, 'tis fix'd—my awful doom
Is fixed. On this side of the tomb,
We meet no more—Why, why did Heaven
Mingle two souls that earth has riven,
Has rent asunder wide as ours?"

Moore.

Claudius, whose fears were roused to the highest pitch from the late accident, dreading that further mischief was on foot against him, hastened his departure for Rome, where he considered himself safer from the machinations of his enemies than in the country; and the gorgeous cavalcade commenced its march, with all

expedition. Agrippina, whose interest it was to keep his fears awake, practised so well upon them that he prohibited Narcissus from appearing in his presence during the journey, under penalty of death. He was, therefore, prevented from vindicating his conduct, while she hourly gave rise to fresh conceits—all tending to insure his ruin on their arrival. The wily Pallas, too, exerted his influence in supporting her endeavours, and confirmed the Emperor in his animosity towards Narcissus. The travellers halted at *Sublaqueum* for the night, and the inhabitants were profuse in their endeavours to do honour to so august a personage and his noble retinue; but Claudius, fatigued with the day's exertion, retired immediately to bed, leaving the banquet to his flatterers, to seek refreshment in undisturbed repose. But fate was adverse to his wishes, and, although wearied, he could only snatch a few agitated moments of sleep,

during which he was visited by a fearful apparition. He dreamt he was struggling in a lake of blood, beyond his depth — gasping and choking with the crimson foam. He cried for help; but in vain. No one moved to offer him assistance, although thousands stood gazing upon him ; and a laugh of mockery burst from their lips as he grew weaker. At length he sank ! and, as he lay stretched upon his back at the bottom, he heard the triumphant shouts of the multitude, enfranchised from the horrors of his yoke. He felt a weight upon his chest, and opening his eyes, which he had closed in despair, he beheld the hideous form of Anaxicrates through the deep crimson element, chattering and making horrible grimaces, while hundreds of mangled bodies stood up around him, and joined in a dreadful chorus—to which they used appropriate action with swords and daggers, pointing them at his heart, or flou-

rishing them above his head, while the chorus swelled louder and louder still. The dwarf's small body weighed heavier than Vesuvius upon his chest. In vain he strove to rise—the more he struggled, the more the imp laughed; and the tears that fell from his eyes in hideous mirth, seemed to Claudius like the lava of a volcano, burning and torturing him. He prayed for death—but felt he could not die; some dreadful power compelled him to exist—to feel the pangs of innumerable deaths, and still live on. At length, an astounding yell of execration from the surrounding phantoms awoke the Emperor, who, gasping for breath and trembling in every nerve, issued orders for the immediate arrest of the dwarf combatant, whose spectral visitation had thrown him into such an agony of terror. Fortunate was it for Anaxicrates that, instead of tarrying at Sublaqueum, he had proceeded by night on his return

to Rome, for the rage of the Emperor was unbounded when he found the object, on whom he wished to vent his spleen, had escaped; and would certainly have immolated the unfortunate imp, for his share in disturbing the quietude of his pillow. His fury knew no bounds, and the torrent fell upon the innocent parties who brought him the information. So far was he bereft of reason, that he persuaded himself the tormentor of his dreams had actually been in his apartments, and conjured up the visions that alarmed him, for the purpose of frightening him out of his existence. In consequence of this, he again dispatched a number of persons to search the different houses in the town, and universal disquietude and consternation prevailed throughout, until day-break. He then became calmer, and felt relieved, when he was convinced the object of his fears was at a distance; but could not help fancying that the

dwarf had certainly been in his chamber, at some period of the night. Agrippina, who had discovered Lollia's visit to the dwelling of Locusta, had secret reasons for nursing instead of quenching his suspicions, and excited his enmity against the mistress of Anaxicrates, in order to punish her for the daring act of holding communication with her enemy.

Claudius departed early from Sublaqueum, surrounded by an escort of cavalry, and amused himself with dice, during the greatest portion of the day, with his courtiers; who, for the purpose of retaining his favor, willingly lost vast sums to him, anticipating that, in time, he would give them ample means of retrieving their losses, by appointing them governors of some rich provinces, where they might easily double the amount by fraud and oppression. Dice, at all times, restored the good humour of the Emperor, and so wedded was he to the amuse-

ment, that business of the greatest importance was compelled to wait until the affairs of the gaming table were adjusted.

At the expiration of the third day, having rested at Prænestæ and Tusculum, they arrived at Rome, to the infinite delight of Claudius; whose fears had been constantly on the alert, since the accident at Fucinus. Orders were instantly given to arrest Locusta and Anaxicrates; the former was seized and imprisoned, but the dwarf was no where to be found.

The period at length arrived destined to complete the misery of two beings whose hearts were bound together by ties that cruelty had not the power to loosen. Octavia was led, a splendid victim, to the temple; there to relinquish every hope of happiness, and receive the hand of Nero, whom she could not love, instead of his whose drooping form was ever present to her imagination with a face pale and dejected,

and his eyes gazing upon her with a reproachful look, while tears of anguish trickled down his cheeks. The vision stood unceasingly before her, and when the moment arrived for the sacrifices to take place, and the Pontifex Maximum was about to place her hand in the palm of Nero—the spectre seemed to stand between them, she felt an icy coldness run through all her frame, a mist gathered before her eyes, her reason forsook her—"Lost, lost for ever!" she exclaimed, and her delicate form fell like a broken lily upon the marble floor. Confusion followed—Octavia was soon carried to her chamber. The Priest was struck with terror at the evil omen. Claudius and Agrippina stood in mute amazement at the altar; while Nero, turning upon his heel, quitted the sacred spot, observing that "Affectation was a thing he utterly abhorred."

On the morning which succeeded this day of

sacrifice, the following letter was placed in the hands of the Princess:

SILANUS TO OCTAVIA.

"At length our destinies are decided —you can never be mine—an ocean rolls between us, whose boisterous billows prevent all chance of a reunion. What remains for me?—Annihilation, or a life of incomparable wretchedness!—I cannot live to make you happy; but I will *die* to free you from the torture of knowing that there is one being wretched for your sake. I shall quit the world with one consolation, which is, that to the last hour of my existence, I retained your affection; and that my death will release you from a partiality in which it is now criminal to indulge. My last prayer is for your happiness—my last thought will bring your image to my eye. Death cannot be bitter with such a vision hanging over me. That you

will long cherish me in your memory I think. That I will die for you I know:

"Fairest and dearest, eternally farewell,

"L. J. S."

It was indeed true, the noble Silanus had destroyed himself, immediately after the union of Octavia with his rival.

The Emperor, who soon began to repent of having so tamely submitted to the will of Agrippina, when he perceived her increasing pride, and undisguised attempts to thwart his wishes in the government, began seriously to reflect upon her conduct. The prosecution of Lollia Paulina had never met with his decided sanction; and he now regretted not having used his influence in her cause; for as his senses awoke to the specks in Agrippina's character, Lollia's gradually became brighter to his imagination. Narcissus too, who until the unfortu-

nate circumstance at Fucinus, was his favorite companion and counsellor; in whose society the lethargy of life was kept away by the fascination of his conversation, was wronged, he thought, from her personal feeling of dislike to him. Other circumstances arose in evidence against her, and it was when one of these deep and dreaded frowns darkened his countenance, that the Empress, unannounced, rushed into the chamber; and seating herself opposite to Claudius, addressed him in an angry tone, with—

"Insult upon insult is heaped upon me and mine! I will not bear it." Here she paused, as if to smother the words of fire that struggled to burst forth; while Claudius gazed upon her in amazement, and demanded the cause of her unseemly passion.

"Your son is the cause! Britannicus scorns your adopted Nero. The name you gave him is forgotten, and he addresses him by that he

bore before you took him under your protection. He calls him Œnobarbus, a name which I would willingly forget—a name I loathe; for it belonged not to the blood of Cæsar, until fate ordained that I should wed with his detested father. By adopting him, that name was wiped away like an unsightly stain, and to the Cæsar's blood you gave a Cæsar's name. First in the Circus was he thus addressed, and the surrounding courtiers, with compressed lips, stifled the audacious smile that strove to curl them; and now the offence has been repeated, with irritating aggravation, before the noblest of the Roman youth—even as he came, shadowed with laurels, from the forum, where you, great Claudius! won by his princely eloquence, granted a restitution to the Rhodians of all their former rights and privileges! While every Roman looks upon my boy with pride, Britannicus endeavours to turn him into ridicule; or,

by reminding them of his corrupt father, arouse their anger and dislike to the uttermost. And must I tamely hear all these affronts? behold the chaplet blighted upon his brow—and stand unmoved? No! As the wife of Rome's Imperial Magistrate, I require protection from such insults for *his adopted* and *my own* noble son."

"Protection! and for what? Consort you are mad, or so puffed up by your good fortune and my show of kindness, that you forget yourself. My poor Britannicus! I fear I have already wronged him much!—What say you!—that insult has been offered to your boy, because my son, my own right loyal son, salutes him by the name his father bore? Had I conceived his father's name to be so dark a blot, trust me, I had not taken into my favour, the relics of that man!—A woman with dishonour for her dowry,—and a youth who blushes to be called by the same name his father bore. As

for my son, I think he has had foul play done to him.—Some persons may forget that he is such, in the vain hope of self aggrandizement by his destruction—but let such beware!"

Agrippina bit her nether lip till the blood dropped upon her snowy hand, which, like a white rose, rested upon her purple vest, as if to keep the indignant beatings of her heart under controul.

"We have indeed," she said, "to offer countless thanks to him who raised us to the envied station we at present keep, yet let me say, and without vanity, Rome could not furnish a fitter wife for Claudius, than the sister of Caligula, and the great-grandchild of Augustus. If anger kindles in my bosom, when I hear the title my husband, in the plenitude of his goodness, has bestowed upon my offspring, tainted with scorn—it is because the Emperor is wronged, his power disputed, and his decrees neglected—his wishes, by his very slaves, unheeded! For

in thy dignity exists the glory of the Cæsarian race—thou art the very soul of their proud line—the mirror of our ancestors, whose vast renown is in thy person transmitted to mankind! Our honour hangs on yours—I merit not reproof from thee—Thou hast a right to love me, though all the world beside with hatred follow me—for all I labour to obtain is thy glory.—I would place it upon a mountain rock, around which billows may foam, and lightnings play unheeded—where it might stand the wonder and delight of nations, unto time's end."

"Look that you injure not Britannicus!" exclaimed Claudius, with a stern countenance. "If you are indeed grateful for the good I have done your son, be careful that you compel me not to fell the tree which has not reached maturity—My royal sapling is dear to me, as thine is to thyself—beware of jealousy!"

"Jealousy!" cried she, with a look of scorn,

and rising from her chair.—" Of what should I be jealous, Claudius?—Hear me—I have professed myself to be your duteous wife—and am so.—But for my watchful care, you would not now, perhaps, have been alive, to tax me with that feeling. In all that becomes a faithful wife, and the Empress of the mighty State of Rome, have I not proved myself sufficient—Have I not been the Argus of your throne—first to discover danger, and apprize you of it——"

" Silence woman!—the good you have done since evil destiny made you my consort amounts to this—you have caused dissension between me and my counsellors, uprooted the confidence I had in men whose places you have never been able to fill up with half their honesty or capability, infested me with clamours and complaints against the noblest ladies of the court, sent into exile all my wealthiest citizens, to

glut your avarice and swell your equipage with their forfeited wealth—infernal Pluto! what has she not done?—Woman beware! remember Messalina!"

The colour fled from the cheeks of Agrippina as he uttered the name; she stood unable to reply, and Claudius, exhausted by the burst of indignation, threw himself upon a couch. She at length recovered her self-possession, and addressing him, calmly, said—

"Allow me a few moments to clear myself from the accusations you have just made. With respect to that wherein you charge me with having made dissension between you and your ministers, I answer that I acted as became an honest wife, and the watchful guardian of your sacred person. The men I pointed as unfit to share your confidence, were those against whose rule the common voice clamoured like thunder in the capitol, whose tyranny had roused up

distant nations to defend their rights, which they would have rung from them by abusive and illimitable power. Men destitute of every art necessary to win the hearts of others, and bursting with envy, luxury and pride! Such a one is Narcissus, that smooth-tongued flatterer, whose words are sweeter to your *ears*, than the rich honey of the Hybla bee is to your *lips*. He is a smiling traitor, who but waits until some favorable moment arrives to sting the hand that fosters him. I know him well, and, ere long, I will expose the hypocrite, that you may read the language of his heart in his unmasked face. You accuse me of having removed men from your confidence, whose situations have never been filled up with equal honesty and ability! Who are they? Who caused Annæus Seneca to be recalled from banishment? the wise, the good Annæus! Who was it restored to your favor Afranius Burrhus, who by

unworthy accusers was driven from your presence and disgraced? Are not these men the glory of the land—notorious for their wisdom and their loyalty? Are they not worthy of your unlimited favors?—does not the voice of truth flow from their lips—is not the seal of honor on their brows—is not the spirit of gratitude within their hearts? You feel a pleasure, it seems, in censuring me for having saved you from inevitable destruction, by detecting the forbidden practices of those who endeavoured to strip you of your wisdom, and share, by the aid of juggling tricks, your state and bed!—They failed; the plotters were by my vigilance discovered, and by your justice banished! *I* sought not to become your wife by arts unholy and prohibited."

"No, but you had a firm friend in Vitellius, his tongue was, I remember, lavish in your praise—and, but that I knew how *incorruptible*

he is, and how *you* loath to win by bribery, what honestly could never be your own, I might perhaps have fancied he was rewarded for his services, with those same gardens, colonades and baths, that lately fell into his hands, *as it is said by purchase*, from the noble Agrippina."

"Vitellius has ever been my friend," she said, while a blush added a deeper beauty to the roses of her cheeks, and suffused the snowy whiteness of her neck and forehead.—"But he is, I trust, as incapable of receiving as I am of offering one."

"And lives there then a woman in Rome whose cheek can give the lie to her own tongue? By Venus!——But thou makest me almost wish to hear thee still—repeat such pretty fallacies, that at each word a deeper blush may rise, and tinge thy bosom with the hue of blood,—nay, never bite thy lips, and flash thine

eyes, like corruscations in the midnight heavens. I pardon thee who would not pardon others. *Your* arts have succeeded, and success in good or evil deserves the reward that tempted us to the achievement. But woe to those who leave the stormy sea in a frail bark, with an unskilful pilot. Let me have no more complaints of Britannicus. I am hungry, very hungry—oh, how I pant to see the groaning board, to hear the music that shall herald in my precious food —the jingling of the glasses, and to taste of that delicious wine, which renders sacred the Campanian Mountain, whose blue top overlooks the spacious plain of golden grapes, upon whose summit the great God of Wine, has built his vine-crowned palace.—Oh, exquisite, Falernian! most exquisite, when wedded to thy chian bride, and sweetened with Sicilias matchless sweets.—Let tasteless fools mix thy bright wines with the salt water of the ocean—give

me thy undiluted strength and flavour. Come to supper—the luxury of life, for which we mortals were sent into the world to feast at and make merry!—He that cannot command earth's choicest viands, and delicious wines—should die. Hark! soft music that delights my soul, ushers in my food—a thousand odours float upon the air—the fairest damsels await my presence to begin their sports—Come my Imperial Consort, come to supper—to supper!"

Claudius led the way into the banquet hall; but Agrippina lingered behind, and remained for some time lost in thought. At length she broke silence, in soliloquy.

"He loves that boy too well, to suit my purpose. Nor can I wonder that his heart yearns after its own. Yet I must check the gushing springs of love that mount so freely, for, while they leap and sparkle, my noble son lives in the sandy desert of his breast—a sun-

parched and neglected plantain. I would not harm that boy—and yet—I would *not* harm that boy. When two proud spirits seek the same great prize, with falchions bared to win it, one must yield! When the twin offspring of the vestal Rhea grew jealous of each other's nobleness, they heeded not the auguries of Heaven, but closed in fatal strife, and *Remus* fell! The stately tree falls by the woodman's axe. 'Success, in good or evil, deserves the reward that tempted us to the achievement.'—So said great Claudius, and yet—I would not harm that boy. Could I but gain his pliant mind to put aside all hopes of the succession,—I should love him. My son observes him with a jealous eye, and sometimes in his looks I see the thought that preys upon his heart. If he were removed—with him would pass away all doubts, fears, suppositions, thoughts of harm. He is the only obstacle that lies in the other-

wise clear path to empire. But then Octavia, his gentle sister—already bending under grief's heavy burden! Oh! she would die at once, if any harm came to him! Then, should I sacrifice Britannicus, I fear my son would burst the bonds that now unite us, and I, deprived of means to keep him in subjection, should be neglected first, and afterwards perhaps despised! Ah! that must not be. Britannicus has many friends, who, though my vigilance may keep them in subjection, only await the fitting time to rise, and hurl my Nero from his giddy height; and in them lies my strength—my power over the actions of my child. To sustain my influence at the vessel's helm, I must have sinews strong to guide it; and who can furnish me with such so well as the immediate son of Claudius? I must keep him, as a thing harmless, until I find my power is on the wane, and then——. No, no; he *must* not die!"

At this moment she was summoned to the banquet, where smiles and homage awaited her, and where she sat like Juno, in her palace-hall of clouds—lovely, and to be feared.

CHAPTER II.

" It is not love—averse to bear
The servile chain that lovers wear,
Let, let me all my fears remove;
My doubts dispel; it is not love.

" Oh! when did wit so brightly shine
In any form less fair than thine?
It is—it is love's subtle fire,
And under friendship lurks desire."

Shenstone.

The Empress retired early to her chamber, where she found Acerronia occupied in copying a head of the Emperor Augustus, from a bust which ornamented a niche in the apartment.

" Still at your task, my love!" said she, in

a tone of unfeigned fondness, "have you been thus engaged ever since I left you this morning, or what other pursuit has taken up your time? How have you passed away the heavy hours?"

"Oh! they were far from heavy," said the smiling girl, "thanks to your goodness, I have a sufficient number of amusements to occupy my thoughts, and prevent the day from seeming wearisome; indeed, I always think night comes too soon. But, walking in the gardens this morning, I met the Princess Octavia; her cheeks were bathed in tears; and when I ventured to enquire the cause, she bade me hold my peace, and not seek to obtain a knowledge of what she was obliged to conceal from every one. 'There is a settled grief,' said she, 'which no one must share with me. I keep it as the miser does his gold—locked in the casket of my bosom; to which there is no key but one, and that is in my custody.' 'The miser *loves* his

treasure,' I replied, 'but grief is an unwelcome store, to part with which makes room for happiness; unlock your heart then—let the evil out—and I will endeavour to supply the vacancy with a delicious store of cheerfulness and content.' But I talked in vain—she clasped me in her arms, and wept upon my bosom till my own eyes dropped tears as fast as hers.—Dear lady! how I feel for her!"—and the tender-hearted girl wept at the recollection of the morning's interview. Agrippina, although she felt for Octavia, and knew full well the cause of her distress, was far from wishing Acerronia to be acquainted with it, and kindly but decisively enjoined her never to touch upon that topic in the presence of Octavia. "The Princess," she continued, may have some secret grief, which none of us have the power to remove; and therefore it would be ungenerous to speak of that which recalls such painful

thoughts to her recollection. Time may restore her tranquillity; but if we, by our want of skill, keep the wound open, how can we hope that it will ever heal?"

The Empress threw herself upon a couch, and beckoned to her fair favourite to sit beside her; who, passing her arm round the neck of her protectress, drooped her youthful head over her face—the bud and the blossom! It was a picture upon which the eye would dwell with unalloyed delight! The jet black hair and eyes, with their dark lashes—the finely-pencilled and over-arching eyebrows, pale cheek, and parental smile, of the one, formed a bewitching contrast to the bright auburn locks, blue eyes, and coral lips, of her companion.

The total ignorance in which this amiable girl lived of the evil traits in Agrippina's character, and the exaggerated reports that reached her ear of every thing she did that in the slight-

est degree merited praise; the many generous and noble actions which she had herself witnessed ; and, more than all, the unfeigned attachment she evinced towards herself, made her believe that they had but one spirit, and that when her mistress died she must die too—so simple was her heart, so perfect its devotion. In the presence of Acerronia, Agrippina forgot the cares and dangers that agitated her during the day—the wrongs she inflicted—and the injuries she received.

" Well, my sweet girl ! now tell me how your time has been employed since you parted with Octavia."

A blush spread over her features as she answered, that Nero had accosted her, and kept her for some time in conversation.

" And did Octavia witness your interview ?"

" Oh, no, she had returned to the palace, and I was plucking some of those fragrant

flowers, you think so beautiful, to fill the vases in your room, when he approached me, and begged so earnestly that I would walk with him, that I was unable to refuse."

"You sigh!—are you unhappy my dear child?"

"Oh, no! how can I be unhappy when you are by my side?"

"Then, wherefore do you sigh?"

"Indeed, I hardly know,—perhaps it is because the prince appeared so unhappy this morning—that is, if sighing is a sign of sorrow—and I cannot help being uneasy when he is so."

"Indeed! why not?"

"Because he is your son, my benefactress!"

"What said he to you, child? you did not walk in silence all the time?"

"No, not *all* the time—though indeed most of it—for he only spoke in broken sentences—

pausing and looking in my face so sadly, as though his heart concealed some thoughts, he was unwilling to utter, yet wished me to be acquainted with.—I thought of dear Octavia, and concluded the same cause occasioned the uneasiness of both parties,—and then—then he pressed my hand with such emotion that I trembled."

"But what said he?"

"Indeed, I cannot remember all—but once he pressed me to his bosom, as he used to do before his hand was given to Octavia, and called me his dear Acerronia—I felt as though I was guilty of a fault, and disengaging myself from his embrace, I hastened from the spot, although he strongly entreated me to remain—but my heart felt so light when I found myself once more seated in this chamber—how different I felt before he was married to Octavia!"

Agrippina heard this artless tale with painful

interest—she remembered the positive command she had laid upon her son, and yet in defiance he followed her, and his purpose was sufficiently evident.—He was the husband of another, and yet sought the society of one for whom he cherished a strong attachment, before his union with Octavia. She looked upon the innocent creature, seated by her side, and kissing her affectionately, gave her such caution as was necessary to secure her from the wild passion of her pursuer.—She pointed out to her the imprudence of once again admitting him to her presence,—cautioned her against his arts to ensnare her heart, which must necessarily entail endless misery to Octavia and herself,—explained his untired passion for fresh pleasure, and painted in the strongest colours the deep disgrace that would necessarily attend the loss of honour,—spoke of the numerous proofs she had given of unwearied fondness and

anxiety for her welfare, and conjured her, if she felt gratitude for such affection, to shun the Prince as her worst enemy, who would gladly pluck the flower, then cast it on the stream of life to perish.

The bewildered girl turned pale as death at the words of Agrippina, and clinging closer to her bosom, vowed (while tears of love and duty trembled in her eyes, like dew upon the violet) to obey her commands in every thing—She fell upon her neck, and thanked her for pointing out the precipice down which she might have fallen, while she trembled at the thought, like a benighted traveller, who among the Alps pursues his pathless way, till suddenly a dreadful gulf appears before him, he knows that one step further would have launched him to the bottom, and shuddering sinks breathless on the snow.

CHAPTER III.

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet, seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

Pope.

THE Empress soon after summoned her attendants, and retired to rest—Acerronia after securing the door of her chamber, offered up her prayers to the deities, for safety during the night. Her eyes were still unclosed, when she fancied she heard a footstep in the room—a second—she started up and listened—but all was again silent, and attribut-

ing the sound to fancy, she resigned herself to sleep. But her alarm was occasioned by a real footstep—the noise was not imaginary !—It was the tread of lust that fell upon her ear and startled her—her sudden rising checked the intruder's progress—he paused, and held his breath that not a sound might break upon the stillness of the night, to awaken his intended victim. A single lamp lighted the apartment, rendering the objects indistinctly visible, and from his hiding-place he observed her once more sink upon her pillow. The calm breathing of her slumber, was the signal for his once more daring to approach the bed,—oh, what a heavenly picture lay before him ! The night was warm, and from the snowy bosom the rival sheet had been removed, to let the cool air wanton with its charms—her auburn tresses fell upon either side of her bewitching face, and descended, bright as the glorious rays of a May morning's

sun, upon the bosom of the Appenines—the full, fair lids, that veiled the pure light of her innocent eyes, with their deep amber fringes, were still as marble, and the half closed lips, sweet lips, that mocked the colour of the rose, revealed a precious store of orient pearls.—The midnight intruder stood lost in wonder at the miracle before his eyes, which, while it heightened his desire to madness, kept him spell-bound, as though the wand of an enchantress waved over him, preventing breath or motion. So perfect was she, that he felt to break her slumber, would be to rob his eyes of the most lovely object they ever dwelt upon, for nothing waking could be half so beautiful.

"The wreath of sleep is round thee love, and passion cannot tempt me to remove it from thy brow," he murmured; "thou fair, incomparable being, whose beauty doth surpass that Grecian maid's, who wounded mighty love with

keener darts than ever lodged within his silver quiver, and glanced like lightning from his unerring bow. Surely thou might'st become a candidate for immortality and live the eternal wonder of the skies, as thou art now the glory of this earth! Thou art my Psyche and myself am Love! for fiercer fires could never lodge within his breast than those which now I feel. I came to revel in unbounded bliss, and now, while heaven lies within my reach, some envious deity of the infernal world prevents me from approaching it, lest my presumption should destroy, at once, a being created for the gods and gods alone. I cannot move even to touch that breast, decked in its amber clouds of waving hair, or press to mine that soft voluptuous mouth, through which her perfumed breath exhales;—thou art too beautiful, my girl, to be despoiled, and, like a broken lily, left to die unheeded. Yet wherefore came I

hither? The long-sought prize is now within my grasp—an instant makes it mine, and yet I pause! How powerful must be the look of innocence, when, even sleeping, it can awe the libertine, and keep his fiery passions under controul! Oh, should those eyes, now curtained from my view, open and see me as I stand thus entranced, how would their lightning dart, and the dark thunder-cloud swell over that brow, which now, like the bright face of a lake upon a summer evening, reflecting the smiles of heaven, is smooth and tranquil. I would enfold thee to my heart, sweet maid, but dare not —nor can I fly from the chamber where such loveliness reposes."

At this moment a deep sigh escaped her lips, and words too softly breathed to reach his ear. He approached nearer, and bent to catch the sense of what she uttered. She spoke again and three words only—but they were words of

power!—such as made the listener's heart beat higher still. His name was breathed in the soft tone of love, and the sad secret of her virgin heart was thus unconsciously revealed—that he was the object of her thoughts by day, her dreams by night. Wild with the transport this discovery occasioned, the charm was broken that had hitherto kept him harmless—and the affrighted girl awoke encircled by his arms whose form had charmed her dreams.

CHAPTER IV.

"Maiden! once gay pleasure knew thee!
Now thy cheeks are pale and deep:
Love has been a felon to thee,
Yet poor maiden do not weep:
There's rest for thee,
All under the tree,
Where thou wilt sleep most peacefully."

K. White.

On the following morning the Empress sent for her young friend to accompany her, as usual, to her oratory, there to implore the favor of the gods, by prayers and offerings; a duty never neglected by her, who in every outward form was punctilious to an extreme of severity, so that the greatest regularity and decorum

presided over her household. All negligence in private or religious duty was punished with her severest displeasure, and she, who overthrew all laws, both human and divine, when opposed to the interests of her ambition, enforced the due observance of them upon all her retainers.

Having waited for some time, in vain, for Acerronia, she proceeded with her attendants to perform the duties of the morning. The sons and daughters of the noblest families in Rome were already arranged in their respective stations, to sing the praise of the celestial deities. As she entered they raised the solemn hymn, accompanied by various musical instruments, and gathering her mantle before her eyes, to prevent their meeting any object of evil omen during the ceremony, stood with her face towards the east, and appeared wrapped in her devotions.

The priest next read the prayers aloud, while

at different periods incense and the richest perfumes were burnt upon the altar, in honour of the divinities they served. The sudden and unusual intrusion of the messenger she had dispatched to Acerronia interrupted the ceremony.—The priest paused in his discourse, and Agrippina turning swiftly round, rebuked the person with a look that made the least religious in the assembly tremble. The girl stood motionless—but in her face there was an expression that excited the curiosity of all, and the conclusion of the ceremony was but little attended to, although a holy silence reigned in the oratory. No sooner was the last prayer concluded, than with the swiftness that rivalled the speed of the antilope, without pausing to question her messenger, whose face was sufficiently expressive of calamity, she hastened to the apartment of her favourite.

Oh, what a scene of anguish met her view!

—her fondly-cherished child—the sweet companion of her happiest hours—and by whose endearing friendship that happiness was created, lay bruised and bleeding in the centre of the room; two female slaves were bathing her temples and applying restoratives, but with little effect, cold and inanimate as death itself, the poor girl was placed upon the couch, while Agrippina with all the tenderness of maternal love, watched for the glimmering of returning sense—enquiry was fruitless—no one knew more than she saw herself—such was the situation in which she had first been discovered by the attendant who came to summon her to the oratory. Tears, strangers to the eyes of the proud matron, now fell in copious showers—tears void of artifice—tears of agony, such as her nature appeared incapable of feeling.—No public business, no private intrigue, could draw her from the side of her favourite—even

Claudius himself, was forced to yield—and cease from his importunate request, that she would withdraw from the apartment.

For two long days and nights, without sleep and almost without food, did she watch over the couch of Acerronia, who, upon waking from a swoon, had become delirious; and, from her ravings, Agrippina formed a shrewd conjecture of the cause of her suffering. Dismissing the attendants, therefore, she watched by her alone, lest they might gain a knowledge of her secret, which, for the sake of those whom it concerned, she wished never to be divulged. Anger and pity agitated her breast by turns.—At times, the former was too great for suppression, and vented itself in threats against the author of this misery; then would she kiss the pale lips of her unconscious patient, and ease her anguish by a flood of tears. At length, returning consciousness beamed upon the face

of Acerronia; but, alas! the recovery of her reason was more afflicting in its effects than the wildness of her delirium. Her first impulse was to kiss the face that hung over her own, in fondness inexpressible; the second to quit the bed, which, with a look of misery and despair, she recognised; and, with an agonised shriek, (that went like a poinard to the heart of Agrippina) she leaped from, in desperation. Her limbs, unable to support, sank under her; but, on her knees, with her white hands uplifted, she implored not to be placed upon that bed again, lest madness should take possession of her brain, and for ever banish reason. Her horror being appeased by every assurance that affection could suggest, the women were called in, and received orders for a couch to be immediately prepared in the private chamber of Agrippina; during which time the enquiring looks of those who remained, were checked by

the commanding gesture of their mistress—a solemn quietude reigned in the apartment. She placed herself by the side of Acerronia, and supported her pale cheek upon her bosom; the arms of the young sufferer were twined around her neck, like the fond ivy round the sheltering elm, while sobs of anguish broke from her lips, and her slight frame shook with emotion. The affectionate caresses of her friend, produced a comparative calm, which, though disturbed by frequent gusts of passion, at length became more settled; but the effort to subdue them exhausted her strength—her arms relaxed their hold—her eyes once more were closed—and the shadows of oblivion again came over her.

"Oh! for a cup of water from that stream, to taste which is to forget the past, that I might pour it into those cold lips of thine, my child! that thou mightest bless me once more with

thy cheerful smile. It is not kind to wish thee to awaken from this trance; but it resembles so the sleep of death—I cannot bear to witness it. Revive! my beautiful, my dear companion, and sooth my guilty bosom with the fragrance of thy breath! Oh! speak to me!—Open those eyes, that they may view my grief. Oh! when before did *sin* so cling to *innocence?*"

Acerronia slowly recovered, and was conveyed into the apartment provided for her, where she was attended by a skilful disciple of Æsculapius, who, from the moment her distressing situation was known, had never quitted the adjoining apartment, from which he visited her at intervals.

The Prince Britannicus was an hourly enquirer after her health, who was so generally loved throughout the palace, that an attendant was placed in an anti-chamber, to answer the numerous questions respecting her. But there

was one more anxious than the rest, who lingered near the door for hours together, eagerly waiting for the approach of those, from whom he could hear constantly of every change that took place during her slow recovery. Every eye was fixed upon him; but his fell before all. The proud and lofty bearing of the adopted Nero, was exchanged for the meek carriage of the slave! The drooping head—the earth directed eye—the faltering step—and frequent sighs, that unconsciously escaped his lips—bespoke a mind but ill at ease; and no one could divine the cause. To their questions he made no reply, or answered in a tone that prevented all further attempts at conversation. During the night his step was often heard, pacing with hurried strides the gallery—then pausing at the door, to catch the sounds that issued from her chamber; wild exclamations fell sometimes from his tongue; and then a groan would

follow! His tutors were alarmed, and represented his behaviour to the Emperor and his mother. The latter was but too well acquainted with the cause of his mysterious conduct, but did not choose to reveal her knowledge; and Claudius cared very little about it; for Nero, by his arrogant behaviour, had injured himself irreparably in his opinion, and his love for Britannicus increased in proportion to his dislike for Nero. Still, however, the influence of Agrippina was too powerful over the Emperor, to admit of his following the full bent of his inclination; which strongly urged him to withdraw from Domitius the title of his adopted son, and leave Britannicus without a rival—the true and lawful heir to the succession. At length, by the assiduity of those who loved her, Acerronia was enabled to quit the confinement of her chamber; but she was no longer the cheerful and kind-hearted maiden, who arose

like a spring morning to the eye—lovely and blithsome, spreading joy around, and winning every heart by the far extending bounty of her own. Where was the smile of happiness, that played like a gay sunbeam upon a dimpled lake—the cheerful eye, which never wept but when kind pity filled it with bright tears—the healthful cheek, by nature tinted with the hue of Heaven? All gone—all faded, as the twilight is lost in darkness! A settled grief took possession of her soul—her eyes were seldom lifted except in prayer—the music of her tongue had ceased to play—her heart was broken! She avoided all who sought her company save *one*, and she had never asked the cause of her distress, but sat with her continually, and endeavoured to lead her mind from the dark labyrinth, in which it was lost, to a more cheerful scene. On leaving her, she generally proposed some endearing task, to occupy her mind until her

return, and by such care contemplated the banishment of that consuming grief which preyed upon her life; but she was deceived—the iron had sunk too deeply into her heart for human skill to extract it! As the Empress never enquired into the cause of her grief, she thought, correctly, that her ravings had acquainted her with all; and congratulated herself upon being released from the pain of a confession, at once distressing and disgraceful.—Night, which brings sleep and quiet to every thing that breathes upon the earth—sweet nature's welcome cradle—was to her the time of terror—one dreadful form stood constantly before her—cold shudderings crept over her—and supplicating cries burst from her lips, startling to those who slept within hearing! She never slept till the day dawned upon her casement, and then, exhausted by the dreadful apprehensions that shook her during the night,

she sank into a feverish slumber, from which she arose pale, feeble, and unrefreshed! So completely had grief taken possession of her, that every movement was mechanical! She rose she knew not why—wandered from one apartment to another, as if unconscious of doing so—performed the tasks her patroness assigned to her, without a thought of how she was employed—made answers, without heeding what was asked—then trembling sought her pillow, and wept till morning! Sometimes she meditated following the example of the virtuous consort of Collatinus; then envied the daughter of Virginius, and mourned her want of such a father to revenge her wrongs, or take the life she could not keep with honour, but which she wanted courage to destroy!

Britannicus, who loved her with the affection of a brother, was often the unconscious cause of her distress; kindness often led him to ask

her questions that darted like so many arrows into her bosom, and brought the startled soul upon her lips, plumed ready for its flight, till by his tenderness she was again calmed. Often would he pass his arm round her delicate waist, and, leading her to a window, force her into conversation; but all his animation could elicit was a sad smile of mournful gratitude, and the warm tear of undisturbed misery. The sudden and unaccountable illness of Acerronia was a severe calamity to him; but he comforted himself with the hope of her speedy recovery, and the thought of renewing studies and pastimes with her as usual. Her constant melancholy puzzled him—he laid awake at night to think of it, and got up in the morning as dissatisfied as ever; he teazed the Empress with innumerable questions, to which she gave evasive answers, that only inflamed his curiosity the more. A thousand times he thought love might

be the cause of her dejection, and as often decided against that supposition; yet still returned to it again and again, as the only thing that could affect a girl, whose spirits were formerly so buoyant, and who possessed every means of enjoyment that wealth could bestow. But then, thought he, how sudden an attachment—and who can be the object? and then he brought to mind a number of persons, and ruminated upon their separate qualities.

"First," said he, "there is the son of Caius Antoninus; his person might attract a girl's regard; but he is too superficial for a mind like her's—too like a broad and shallow stream, which hides not the dark mud over which it glides—a smiling surface with a miry bottom. No, no, he is not the man for Acerronia. Then there is young Atilius, he is of too gloomy a disposition to entrap her heart. Now Manlius Pomponius, if his hump could be removed,

would be the very man to suit her disposition, for he is noble in mind and birth; affectionate, benevolent and just! The very creature to ensure her happiness for life—but hang the hump! No, no, he cannot be the envied mortal. Fabius Furius is fonder of cutting throats than wooing—he pants for a commission in the army, and would rather embrace a foe in mortal strife than a lady in amorous dalliance."

And thus he continued weighing their various merits and accomplishments with their likelihood of success with Acerronia; but in each he found some reason to believe *he* could not be the man to win her. Then came sweet vanity and whispered in his ear—"Why should not you be the person?" The question startled him, and he placed himself, by instinct, before a large mirror, quite satisfied with the figure he made. He next began to search his memory for words, or looks, which he might construe into

proofs of love on her part. Alas! how easy it is to deceive ourselves—to fancy that we hear, in the kind voice of friendship, tones of passion; from every simple action form some proof confirmative of what our hearts desire, draw poison from each word, each look and smile, that means no more than when it used to charm us before we laid "the flattering unction to our souls," that they were caused by love for us alone.

"In the first place," said he, "I am more frequently in her presence than any other of my sex; we know each other's wishes by a look; words would be useless with us, were it not for the pleasure we derive from the tones of our voices! and *hers* is exquisitely musical, *that* no one can be so stupid as to dispute.—Then our tastes agree in every thing; and nothing can ever be so delightful as the walks we used to take—and now I think of it, how often

has she praised my moderation, in quitting my companions at the banquet, to walk with her, which she said made her happy!—Why what a dull, senseless blockhead have I been, not to discover this before. Dear girl! by Venus and her doves I must seek her out directly. The cause of all her melancholy is discovered—I am the cause! who for her sake would give all that is or may be mine. I'll—I'll go and make amends—I'll tell her how I love her, and then—what then? 'Pshaw, I'll answer that question hereafter." So saying, he hastened to find her, determined to make her a proffer of his heart, and demand hers in exchange.

CHAPTER V.

"Are not my wrongs gone up to heav'n against you?
Do they not stand before the throne of Jove,
And call incessant on his tardy vengeance?"

Ulysses.

"The Furies seize thee!
Thou hast struck me to earth, blasted my hopes,
The partial gods are leagued with thee against me,
To load me with dishonor."

Ibid.

Without pausing to reflect any longer upon the subject, he ran with all his speed from the pavilion, where this hasty resolution was formed, to various apartments, where he hoped to find the object of his search—he had

already met with three disappointments, when, as he passed the private closet of the Empress, he heard the voice of Nero, unusually loud, as if in anger—Much as he despised the character of a listener, he could not resist the inclination that compelled him to do so, when he heard a voice say something in reply, in broken sentences, as if the speaker was sobbing violently. —He could not be mistaken in that voice—its music had a thousand times brought comfort to his heart—and to hear it in the tone of anguish struck him to the centre. Curiosity being roused to the height, to know the cause of quarrel between them, and anxiety for the happiness of Acerronia, he was tempted for once to play the eaves dropper, and carefully opening the door of the apartment, sufficiently wide to catch their conversation, he listened attentively to the following dialogue:

"Hear me, rash girl! passionate love led me

to commit an indiscretion, or, as you prefer the word—a crime—Beware how you endeavour to turn that love to hatred—if you breathe one syllable to awaken suspicion in my mother or Octavia, you know not the misery it may bring upon yourself."

"Alas," said the unhappy girl, in tones so feeble, that Britannicus could not catch them distinctly; "I have suffered too much misery from you already, Nero, to dread your threats—the worst your hate can compass is my death, and that I pray for hourly—nay, take my life, and cancel, by one kind act, the pangs your cruelty has occasioned me, and I'll forgive you with my dying breath. I have already told you your mother does not stand in need of my confession;—during my delirium I feel convinced, she gathered all the information necessary to confirm her worst suspicions."

"And which your pretended misery serves

to strengthen. Hypocrite! wherefore should you walk in such a mask.—Are you not, in the eyes of all the world, as pure as Vesta's Virgins?—What mortal knows of the circumstance?—'Sdeath! should this story reach the ears of Claudius, farewell to all my hopes of greatness! his wise head is only seeking for some cause to cast me off, and then his witless spawn, may domineer and lord it over me without the least controul."

"Were you possessed of half his virtues I should not sit now thus degraded in your presence; or be compelled to hear this language of reproach, which ought to summon up the blush of shame and turn your cheeks to crimson."

"I was not aware Britannicus possessed so fair a champion—perhaps you love him?"

"Oh, cruel Nero! how have I merited this treatment—I must retire."

"Indeed you must not, lady!—Hear me—a

thought strikes me, which will advance our mutual interests.—Come, smooth your brow, and wipe away those tears, 'tis plain you love me not, you cannot forgive the folly I, in a wanton hour committed, but for which your beauty should be answerable, being the irresistible cause of all. I cannot love unless my love is returned, though Venus lay upon my bosom, as fresh and fair as when she first rose from the Cyprian wave. The love *I* have not power to obtain *he* may deserve. You own his merits —and my jealous eyes have long since discovered, the determined preference you give to *him*, upon all occasions. That he loves *you* I am convinced, from every look and action.—What say you now, to becoming the wife of young Britannicus?"

"That I would rather die. I am a simple girl—an orphan—indebted to the Empress for all the

good I have enjoyed—and—to her son for endless sorrow. My days were passed in innocence and contentment, until the unfeeling libertine, like him, Rome's execration and its scourge,—the Tarquin, broke in upon my unguarded slumbers, and, by force, bore off the treasure he could not replace—This heartless murderer of innocence—this embryo curse of nations, asks me to link myself, all spotted as I am, and tainted with pollution, to the true heir of Rome's great Emperor! Rather than clog my soul with such a crime, may Jove, in his great mercy, send his lightnings down, and scorch me into dust!"

Anger and disdain flashed from her eyes, as she addressed her wronger, who paused until the storm had somewhat abated, and then replied, in a sarcastic tone:

"You think too seriously of this matter; you should not let so light a trifle ruffle your tem-

per; for my part, I think that, even as you are, you are quite good enough for such a husband as Britannicus would make, beside, he knows not of our intercourse, and he who in his ignorance is happy, should continue so; besides, a girl of spirit, like yourself, must feel annoyed at being looked upon as a dependant."

"Ungenerous man!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "I never felt dependant until this moment."

"And you may blame yourself for feeling so now—summon reason to your aid, and be guided by its dictates. You are young and beautiful but—dependant. You may be the daughter of Claudius Cæsar, possessed of rank and wealth enough to turn the heads of half the women of the Empire. I am certain this may be accomplished, if you will lend your aid, and thus you will free my heart from some unwelcome doubts. I would not have our inti-

macy known for half beneath the skies, and by this union I shall at once secure your secrecy, and my own confidence: come, come, we will forget our upbraidings, and act in concert for our mutual welfare."

"I wish I could as easily forgive, as you can commit an injury. You speak as lightly of a virgin's fame, as the base men in Babylon, whose daughters lie by Venus' Temple, to receive the embraces of every stranger, and who might look up even to beasts for chastity."

"Those Babylonians, Madam, act only in accordance with an ancient custom, and for my part I think a pleasant one. It spares the work of words, and does away with frivolous reproaches, which the fair sex think it a duty to bestow upon us, who grant them the favour they are most anxious to obtain, and are most ungrateful for when gratified."

"It is not requisite, Prince, that I should

listen to such ribald language—you will therefore permit me to retire."

"Nay, nay," said he, detaining her, "I only attempted to defend the poor Babylonians, whom you handled rather unmercifully."

"I demand my liberty!"

"I cannot grant it until you consent to my proposition."

"Oh, Empress, where art thou, to free me from this rude unfeeling man?" cried the distracted girl, in a voice of suffering, that penetrated into the heart of Britannicus. He could controul, himself no longer—the door flew open—and rushing between them, he exclaimed—"Here, here, dear Acerronia, is a friend! Rely upon it no one shall insult you while I am present. Nay, never look so black at me, good Ænobarbus—I always keep my word."

Acerronia endeavoured to thank him, but the words died away upon her lips.

"Should he have overheard our conversation," thought she, "oh, mighty powers! what must he think of me? how he must loath me, when he reflects upon what I *have been*, and upon what I *am!*"

Tortured with thoughts like these, with tottering steps she approached the door, and waiving her hand to decline the assistance of Britannicus, she quitted the apartment.

Nero who had hitherto stood still, and full with anger, no sooner witnessed the departure of Acerronia, than he broke out into strong invectives against the Prince, for his untimely interruption.

"It is the curse of courts," said he, "to meet with spies at every turn—mean, pitiful spirits, who, conscious of their utter worthlessness, feast their malignity with finding out the secrets of their betters, for the sole pleasure of detraction; grovelling minds that fain would

bring the soaring intellect down to the dust, in which they crawl—whose breasts are filled with envy's hissing snakes—base, despicable wretches, with whom the sons of royalty are not ashamed to mingle, and even imitate their infamy."

"You are angry, Domitius," replied Britannicus, "and utter that which, in your cooler moments, you will be sorry for. The name of listener suits not the son of Claudius, nor does a falsehood become the mouth of Enobarbus."

"Falsehood!"

"Aye, falsehood—you know you have uttered one—Could I stoop so low as to become a spy upon your actions?—A spy watches for reward, or from the instigation of his own fears! I am too wealthy to need the former, and cannot dread the object I despise."

The hand of Nero grasped his dagger's hilt, but he checked the murderous impulse, and in

a voice trembling with rage, demanded—"What brought him to the apartment of his mother."

"The voice of Acerronia pleading for aid against a vile oppressor. I have answered your question, and now reply to mine. How is it that you so far forgot the respect due to that lovely girl, as to cause the cry of anguish that attracted me? Dare you reveal the reason of the sudden change in one who *was* the happiest of the gay—the loveliest and best beloved of all who worship innocence. Why does she sit for hours absorbed in thought, speechless and sad, whose tongue was once the ceaseless instrument of joyful melody? You know, but dare not tell me; your lips cannot reveal the cause, but your eyes, those windows of the soul, expose its guilt:—go, hide your head in darkness!"

With a spring that exceeded the tiger's in its fierceness, Nero fastened upon the throat of his

upbraider, but although he had the advantage in years and strength, his agility and dexterity were inferior. Britannicus was partial to all those sports which render the body pliant and active; at wrestling, leaping, tennis, throwing the quoit, and warlike exercises he had few rivals; the struggle was, therefore, rendered more than equal, by the coolness with which he received the attack, and the dexterity by which he turned the strength of his enemy against himself. He had twice flung Nero, with a violence that encreased his rage to madness. The third time they fell together, and Nero, by an exertion of strength, was uppermost: with one hand he felt for his poniard, which Britannicus perceiving, snatched it from his girdle, and cast it to a considerable distance. Nero released his intended victim to regain possession of it, but in an instant found himself locked in the tenacious gripe of his antagonist; his strength

was nearly exhausted, while Britannicus was still fresh and nimble, and the next fall stretched the agressor senseless upon the floor.

The noise they made attracted the attention of some of the domestics, as they passed the apartment, who, finding Nero prostrate upon the ground, and a dagger lying near him, became alarmed, until assured by Britannicus that nothing dangerous had happened. They soon removed him to his own apartment, and Britannicus, anxious to calm the apprehensions of Octavia, hastened to her chamber for that purpose.

CHAPTER VI.

"True; when I heard thy deep detested name,
A shiv'ring horror crept through all my frame,
A damp cold chill, as if a snake or toad
Had started unawares across my road;
Yet I kept silence: still thy spleen or pride,
(Thy better demon absent from thy side)
Urged thee to new assaults. Fool! there's a *time*
When slowness to resist becomes a crime—
'Tis here! the hour of suff'rance now is o'er;
And scorn shall screen thee from my arm no more."

Gifford.

NARCISSUS, irritated at having failed in his endeavours to save Paulina from the persecution of Agrippina, and burning to revenge himself for the insults she had heaped upon him, became a constant attendant upon the Emperor, who cherished him for the brilliancy

of his wit and elegant conversation, but chiefly, for his inordinate love of play. It was the policy of Narcissus to enlarge upon the virtues and accomplishments of Lollia Paulina, and by judicious comparisons lead the Emperor into a train of thought, by no means favourable to her enemy. As he contrived to lose a considerable sum before he commenced this kind of discourse, Claudius was generally in too good a humour not to listen with some attention to it; by degrees it raised his fears, at all times easily excited. The freed man watched the effect upon his master, and pictured the unbounded sway she held over the Senate—her uncontroulable ambition, and love of undivided power —the enormous piles of wealth she had accumulated—and her insatiable appetite for all that could, by fraud or force, be drawn within her power. He painted the danger of a woman, like Agrippina, gaining such sinews to

strengthen partizans, and achieve by the aid of gold whatever could not be carried by the laws of equity or justice. He awakened his pride and indignation, by informing him that the magistrates paid more attention to her wishes than to his own, that they dare not disobey her; but, subverted to her will by the power of gold and terror, they had become detested by the people, who openly complained that justice had fled from Rome.

The effect of these conversations broke out one evening at the banquet table, when Claudius, heated with wine, expressed himself warmly upon the subject of his wives irregularities, which, as he said, forced him at last to take from them the power of doing further mischief; and publicly accused Agrippina with being more despotic than the late Empress, who paid, by an ignominious death, for the enormities she committed during her life. This obser-

vation was, of course, carried to Agrippina.—Decision was a leading feature in her character, and the question was—whether she should submit to punishment, or inflict it. The choice was easily made—and no sooner determined upon, than means were sought for to carry it into effect. It was near midnight when she dispatched a messenger upon the important business, and with an excess of agitation, approaching to agony, she paced her apartment with rapid steps, pale as the marble images that surrounded her. Sometimes she stopped, as if to rally her retreating spirits—her dark eyes flashing—her nostrils dilated—her lips compressed—her fingers clenched—and her noble figure drawn to its full height. She looked beyond expression beautiful, or rather, terribly sublime—like Juno in her wrath, when she conspired against the Thunderer. Frequently she paused to listen, with pale and trembling

lips, half opened, as if to make the sense of hearing more acute; and then, with a deep sound of disappointment, renewed her agitated walk. Suddenly she stopped before a statue of Claudius, and exclaimed—"Thou shame to power!—thou dolt! created only for mankind's contempt—thou sensual savage! to whom I linked myself for god-like power, not for disgraceful love! As yet, I have been to thee a beacon light, and saved thee from the rocks on which thy clumsy bark must have been wrecked, and dashed into a thousand pieces; and my recompence is—to live in fear that the first whirlwind of thy frantic wrath will sink me to perdition! The drunkard's tongue is truth's conveyancer—and I am warned in time. Oh Pallas! wherefore do you tarry thus?—the strings of expectation are on the stretch, and must needs break if you arrive not quickly!"

Exhausted with the contending emotions that

shook her frame, she threw herself upon an ivory throne, inlaid with precious stones; but her eye fixing by chance upon a portrait of the Emperor, curiously set in one arm of it, she started up, as if suddenly stung by an adder, and sank upon a couch in the centre of the apartment. With her dark eyes turned towards the tapestry, she sat for some time, motionless as a statue. At length the arras moved, and in an instant Pallas was at her feet.

"Man, man!" cried the impatient matron, "what could have thus detained you? It is a full hour since my messenger was dispatched—and an instant should have brought you to my presence!"

"I was engaged with the Emperor," he replied, "and left him but a few minutes since, when I received your summons, and flew with winged feet to meet my goddess."

"Well, well, I must forgive you; come and

sit by me, truant! Now tell me what your business was with Claudius. Pallas! how bright your eyes are—is there a magic power in my touch that turns them thus to stars? how beautiful they are! But tell me what was your business with the Emperor?"

"He is uneasy at the succession of evil omens that have appeared of late, and fears some dire calamity is at hand. This morning the ensigns of the Prætorian guard were consumed by lightning; and the soldiers, full of terror and amazement, wander about the city, and increase the fears of the citizens with their exaggerated reports, already sufficiently alarmed by the death of Antonius, their favourite tribune."

"So I have heard; and the fate of Quintus Varrus, the quæstor, who a few days since was flung from his horse, and dashed upon the threshold of his door ——. Can those bright locks of yours be real, Pallas? you must have

mingled with them threads of gold !—and saying this, she parted the clustering ringlets as they hung over his forehead. "Well, what said Claudius ?"

"He has commanded the Hauruspices to offer sacrifices and prayers to the gods, for his safety. A raven, swooping from the right to the left this morning, nearly brushed him with its wings; of this he speaks continually, and the gorgeous feast prepared for him he left almost untouched, although the tears rolled down his cheeks at its removal."

"His fears must be removed, my friend, for if his gluttony deserts him, his better senses may begin to rule, and possibly frustrate my intentions—my hand ?—well take it. Why that burning kiss—nay, give your tongue a rest, your eyes are far more eloquent than words—you love me ! well, and do not I love you ? Yes, and our love, my Pallas, is built upon too sure

a foundation to be overthrown by any transient gust of passion. Self-interest cements our hearts together—ambition leads us forward hand in hand; we labour for one end—our own aggrandizement! and every step I took towards the throne, after the death of Messalina, was followed and concealed by the impression of your manly foot. You lent your aid to my aspiring hopes, and were rewarded with myself—together we command the fate of Rome! for what is Claudius but a worthless tool, a thing which we despise yet wilfully detain? Were he removed!—ah, envied man! how might you lift your head above the rest,—how proudly tower over the pigmy throng! Alas, I am too fond, and in my lavish love forget my state—my *danger*—aye and *yours*."

The sudden transition of tone, from fondness to alarm, startled Pallas, who, with all the impetuosity of love, requested her to inform him

of the cause. Unable to trifle longer with her feelings, and thinking she had already done more than sufficient for her purpose, she proceeded to acquaint him with the language of Claudius at the banquet.

"Rely upon it my death is already determined upon, I am not certain that to-morrow will not dawn upon my grave! perhaps, even now, the cup is drugged for my destruction, or the dagger unsheathed for the fatal blow. You will perish too—My Nero will be robbed of all his golden hopes, and driven forth to wander like a beggar in solitary exile, and Messalina's offspring mount the throne, which for *my* child I have laboured to obtain, through perils that would make a bold heart quail to undertake. You say you love me! now then prove your love—his life and mine are in the scales of fate, they balance equally, and waver for the daring act which is to give *one* the preponderance. The speedy

removal of this man is as necessary for your welfare as it is for mine. Let him be disposed of and who shall claim my person but yourself—our loves will meet with no further interruption, and I will moreover pay thy services with countless wealth. And now," she continued, "fly, like a Parthean arrow, to that witch Locusta, who now lies a prisoner by my orders, for aiding Lollia Paulina in her designs upon the tyrant. This ring will gain you admission to her dungeon—fly with the speed of thought—question me not—but go and bring her here."

In obedience to the commands of his mistress, the lover departed to perform his errand, without reply; while she, pale, haggard, burning like a volcano with her secret fires, with her hands clasped upon her forehead, sat—agitated by wild conjectures, hopes, fears, and all the retinue of guilt!

The midnight wind moaning dismally without, startled her from her reveries at intervals, and fancy conjured strange phantoms to her side.—Sounds like the whispers of concealed spies fell upon her ear, and with a faltering step she raised the lamp to search for some persons she fancied were in the room; then, after a fruitless search, she walked on tiptoe to her seat again, and remained motionless as the sculptured figure on its pedestal, till the next gust again called up her terrors, and like a spectre she renewed her search in vain. Sometimes she was startled by the loud pulsation of her heart; her sighs appeared to her to be the breathing of some invisible being by her side; and at length her over-wrought imagination brought before her eyes the figure of her dead husband, Passienus. So perfectly was she convinced of his supernatural presence, that she addressed the phantom in a trembling voice, which by de-

grees grew stronger, as her desperation increased—

"Thou shadowy form! upon whose silver locks the marble weighs, which names thee as a creature that *hath* been! Why, at a time like this, dost thou desert the tomb, and open those glazed eyes that have so long been closed in the dark sleep of death? Gods! how they glare upon me, as if they would transform me into stone—a terrifying emblem of fell murder! That pale, emaciated, care-worn cheek is still untainted with corruption, and that bony finger still wears the circlet which my false hand adorned it with, upon the cursed day we wedded! Can flaming Tartarus fling back the souls we hurried to it, to torment us afterwards? Hence to your realms of fire, detested shade! Thou cans't not shake the mind of Agrippina! Fool! fool that I am," cried she, rising with an effort, "to let my busy brain

subdue the energies of my soul, and fright myself with unsubstantial terrors! Hark, hark! my trusty instruments approach. I will reward thee, Pallas! for thy speed; and let Locusta prove true in this necessity, I will forgive her trading with my rival."

The secret pannel again unclosed, and Pallas, accompanied by the dreaded Locusta, entered the apartment.

Her figure was bowed more from her general occupation than from years; for, as the reader may remember, she was in the habit of wandering into the neighbouring fields and woods for the purpose of culling herbs, which, from a knowledge of their salutary or pernicious qualities, gave her at once both fortune and a command of life and death. The time she spent in gathering these samples of vegetation had created a stoop, which naturally belongs only to those much more advanced in years. When

she entered the room her figure was so closely enveloped in the pallium, or cloak worn by the Roman women when they went abroad, that her features could not be distinguished; but throwing it instantly aside, the fell malignity of her visage caused a momentary shudder even in the daring Agrippina. Her thin, dark hair had escaped from the ribbons that bound it, and hung without a curl upon either side of her sallow and emaciated cheeks, while her skinny lips assumed a smile, the meaning of which was a mystery to the beholder. Her long and bony neck was decorated with large chains of gold, and her ears were adorned with costly ornaments. Her *stola* was of the same materials as those worn by the middle class (white ornamented with a border of gold) and on her feet were sandals of fawn colour.

"Approach," said Aggripina, in a voice al-

most inarticulate from emotion, "approach thou minister of darkness!"

"I will, Goddess of Light!" replied the sybil, with a sarcastic look, that made the Imperial blood rush to the cheeks of her accoster, "'tis not the first time I have had the honour of a private audience with the illustrious consort of Claudius Cæsar. Poor Passienus!"

"Silence, thou presumptuous witch," almost shrieked the Empress, starting from her seat, "or expect a punishment more terrible than that which overtook the fool Ascalaphus."

"Ascalaphus was changed into an owl—I love the owl—he is my midnight comforter—he is the sole spectator of my labour, when mortals close their eyes in sleep!—he screams a welcome to me as I approach his dwelling among the ruins, where the foul weeds of earth spring up, and flourish for my knowledge to

turn them into use; he hops upon the tombstones of the *mighty* dead, as I pass by them, and greets me as his intimate acquaintance—I respect Ascalaphus!"

"Silence, woman!" interrupted Pallas, "the Empress would engage you in a plot which requires the skill of Æsculapius, with the secresy of the grave."

"Supremely honoured am I indeed, sagacious Pallas! When secret murder is contemplated, who is so favored as the wretch whose skill can mix the sure and subtle beverage which quiets all."

"Who mentioned murder?" interrogated the favorite.

"Surely no one; for where Locusta is, the word is worse than useless. But let us to business—Lady, you need my help—who is to be disposed of?"

"Claudius."

"I thought so."

"My life is in danger!—already has a threat escaped his lips. While he exists it hangs upon a thread, which fate may in a moment sever—and Messalina's destiny be mine."

"This is a bold design indeed!—another Cæsar to be added to the list of murdered Emperors. I knew your brother well, lady; he was a friend to me and I to him. During his short but memorable reign my time was fully occupied, and I rejoice to find his place so well supplied by *you!*" This was uttered with a sneer, in which the concentrated malice of a thousand dæmons was conveyed.

Disgusted with her audacity, the haughty Agrippina cast a look of deadly indignation at the offender, bidding her, at the same time, restrain the freedom of her tongue,—"Or by the furies!" she exclaimed, "I'll have it torn out by the roots, and thus inflict upon you a

perpetual silence, if you dare further to offend me. Your office here is not to *talk* but *listen*—to *serve* and not *insult*—nay, breathe but one syllable that may rekindle my anger, and I will have thee bow-strung in my sight."

Pallas addressed a few words to his mistress in a low voice; and then turning to Locusta, who stood confounded by the determined tone and action of the Empress, accosted her in a soothing voice, and after a full disclosure of the plot awaited her reply.

"And what reward," said she, "am I to expect for this important service, for which the Empress deigns to hold secret communion with the base Locusta, for the second time?—Is it to be again deprived of freedom?—To suffer the insulting taunts of brutal jailers?—To make appeals in vain to those for whose interest I act, and who leave me to persecution and despair, until

some fresh victim renders my liberty and assistance needful?—A goodly recompense truly, for services like mine!—I am a wretch it is true—I live by giving death to others, yet I am but a minor actor in the tragedy—the *executioner*, and not the sentencer! If evil lost its influence in Rome, the despised Locusta would perish, perchance, for want of shelter—the world abhors me and I loathe the world, save when I am called upon to gratify myself, by inflicting misery upon the human race. The love of life and power clings equally to the high-born and the low—the worm, when lacerated, retains existence longer than the lion, and life is dear to me as to you mortal, who can stoop to employ my baneful arts for her own wicked purposes, and yet inflict a punishment upon me, for giving to others that which she finds so useful. When Passienus died, was I the cause?—Did I from hatred of the

man destroy him?—No—I was the humble instrument of guilt, and not the source of it!—And yet by her commands have I of late been barred within the limits of a prison, attended by a scurvy insolent, appointed only for his enmity towards me, to that disgraceful office. If I am to expect such a reward as that, you will pardon me when I decline accepting so much gratitude and generosity."

"While Locusta was speaking, the features of Agrippina underwent a variety of changes—shame, terror and indignation, were perceptible by turns; at length, after an effort to controul herself, in which she succeeded, she offered instant liberty to Locusta, and taking from her arm a bracelet of extraordinary value—"This," she said, "shall be your reward."

The woman knelt as she received the glittering bauble, and after examining the jewels of which it was composed, promised to furnish a

poison that should speedily insinuate itself through all the veins, and cause a sudden death.

" No !" cried the Empress, " that must not be—such a death would reveal both plot and perpetrators !"

" Well, at what period would you have him die? I can administer a subtle draught, slow in its operations, and yet certain, one that will let him linger for a year, and then die as of a natural decay at its expiration."

" Nay, that will be more dangerous than the other !" said Pallas, " the Empress stands in danger, from his unconquerable anger, of being the first victim in that case. Is it not in your power to concoct a poison which, by producing insanity at first, might render all his orders fruitless, and slowly working upon his frame and mind, extinguish his madness and his life together. The disease of his intellect will be

considered as a visitation of the gods, and his death, following some few weeks afterwards, will be attributed to the same cause."

Locusta promised to produce a powder which would operate as they wished, and Agrippina waving her hand for them to depart, the midnight visitors retired through the same aperture by which they entered.

CHAPTER VII.

"He has taken Rome even in the nicest minute,
And easily debauched her to his ends,
When she was overcloy'd with happiness,
Wantonly full, and longing for a change."

Otway.

Shortly after the events of the preceding chapter, the foul crime was perpetrated through the instrumentality of the Emperor's physician. The poison which was at first administered failed in its effects; and, to make all certain, he was obliged to introduce a poisoned feather into the throat of the Emperor at the banquet, under

the pretence of creating for him a fresh appetite, which completed his destruction. Rumour hurried through the streets of Rome, with consternation and confusion upon either side—causing the tongues, the hearts, and minds of men to talk, feel, and think,—yet hardly knowing what or why. Assertions, contradictions, hopes, and fears, were mingled together; and the people, clamorous and inquisitive, kept up a continual din, which only increased their misunderstanding and apprehensions. The shops were closed, the porches, baths, and colonnades, resounded with the tread of hurried footsteps! A report had gone abroad that the Emperor was no more; while the servants in the palace confidently asserted that he still existed, but was too ill to show himself to the populace. The soldiers thronged round the gates, with looks of anxious solicitude, eager to know the truth. Reports were conveyed to

them hourly of every change the Emperor was said to undergo, preparing them to hear the worst with patience. Such was the homage they bore to the name of Cæsar, that, however vile the heart of its possessor, his person was held sacred by the soldiers, in veneration for the memory of the immortal Julius.

While the people were thus excited without, —false mourning and true sorrow were busy within the palace. The murderess sat aloof— as if she had become a prey to inconsolable grief, admitting none but Octavia and Britannicus to her presence; and to them she bewailed the loss of Claudius, with all the appearance of a fond and faithful wife. Octavia was easily deceived by her pretended grief; but Britannicus saw through the artifice, and in his heart accused her of the crime he dared not openly tax her with having committed. Her tears and loud complaints were disgusting to him, while

he mourned for the silent misery of his sister, who spoke but little, although the canker was in her breast! Agrippina's apparent fondness for him he treated with a haughty disregard, and sometimes with a look that pierced her very soul; but the time and circumstances checked the angry words which at such moments rose to her quivering lip.

The halls of the palace were crowded with mournful faces, and rejoicing hearts; and they who heaped ashes upon their heads, had a large store of pleasure in their bosoms. Some, indeed, who had been raised to wealth and power by the favour of the deceased, and seeing no likelihood of bettering their condition by the unexpected change, had reason to regret his death, although they could not teach themselves to respect his memory. Such is the fate of tyrants, their most abject flatterers—the beings upon whom they shower their bounty—despise

the man, before whose feet they bow and kiss the dust. At length, by the consent of the augurs, whom Agrippina consulted about the propitious moment for making the Emperor's death known to the public, the gates were thrown open, and the fatal catastrophe communicated. Large donations were distributed among the soldiers in the name of Nero, with the hope of drawing their hearts to the successor of Claudius; for without their sanction, the adopted heir would not venture to take the title that so unjustly devolved upon him. Britannicus reigned in the hearts of all good men, but the powerful interest of Agrippina made them fearful of expressing their dislike to Nero's accession. Fear conquered love within their breasts, and hope was their only comforter; while they stifled their indignation against the intriguing woman, who by her arts had caused an imbecile tyrant to plunder his son of his

own birthright, in order to aggrandize her progeny.

Nero, attended by Burrhus, and a numerous train of courtiers, apparelled in the costly trappings of state, now presented himself upon the platform which extended from the palace to the Campus Martius, to give the people an opportunity of beholding their future Emperor to advantage. It was covered with the richest cloths, embroidered with golden eagles, and numerous other devices. He was cheered upon his appearance; but, from the ranks of the Prætorian guards, the name of Britannicus sounded too often upon his ear, and checked the smiles he wished to throw into his face in answer to the plaudits of his friends. Burrhus remonstrated with him upon the folly of shewing the people how much the name annoyed him, requesting him to acknowledge their greetings with courtesy and condescension.

"I would that Jupiter would choke those with his thunderbolts, who bellow out the name of Britannicus so loudly, when mine alone should rend their vulgar throats! A foul rot seize upon their rebel hearts! When gold and silver fall in showers around them, and they overthrow each other to obtain their idol, they grumble at the hand whose bounty flings it to them."

"Nay, nay, there are but few who grumble," replied Burrhus, "look around you—see how they hurl their caps up to the sky, and listen to the deafening shouts that drown all opposition—heed not the discontented few, when such a multitude of voices welcome your approach. Now smile, and kiss your hand—that's well—that's well—now place it upon your heart, and bow again. Does not that cheer repay your condescension?"

Wreaths and laurels were flung from the

windows as he passed, and ladies waived their white arms from the balconies to the long train of youths that followed at his heels. Windows and roofs were crowded with spectators, and the air resounded with the clang of warlike instruments. It was a cloudless morning—the air was fresh and sharp, refreshing and invigorating to the body. The litter in which he was carried was one blaze of precious stones. His shirt of gold, ornamented with a profusion of diamonds, was fastened at the waist with a cingulum (or belt) of the same costly gems, and fastened in front with a carbuncle of unknown value; and the chlamys, or purple toga, with a deep embroidered border, was arranged in graceful folds about his person. Amidst the cheers of the populace they reached the camp, were the veterans were ranged in order, to receive and hail him as their future Emperor.

Nero, who had hitherto used a careless de-

meanour, slightly bowing to his friends, and cursing those who mentioned Britannicus, by turns—now felt a secret terror at his heart as he approached the warlike ranks of those, without whose welcome his dreams of glory would vanish into air; and so much did it increase when he gazed around him, and saw upon every side the bristling spears and glittering armour of the soldiery, that, in replying to Burrhus' question, who marked the sudden change of his countenance, and eagerly enquired the cause—his voice faltered to such a degree that his answer was unintelligible.—Encouraged by the General, however, he rallied his drooping fortitude, after asking—"if he might depend upon the soldiers?" Burrhus replied in the affirmative. Indeed, in the presence of their General, beloved as he was by them, few ventured to exhibit their dislike; and a deafening shout of welcome from the

hardy warriors quieted his fears, and endowed him with sufficient confidence to repeat the speech, composed by Seneca for the occasion. At first his voice was weak and broken, but, as he proceeded, the glowing language called forth his natural powers of oratory; his energies unfolded themselves by degrees—enthusiasm was in each tone and action, giving fresh beauty to the composition, and creating in the bosoms of his hearers a corresponding feeling. Loud cheers followed the conclusion of his address, and the soldiers, unhelming, waived their glittering morions in the air; and "Long live Nero!"—"Long live our Emperor!"—was shouted through the camp. The heart of him who caused this animating scene throbbed with delight. He kissed his hands—then pressed them on his breast and bowed, to thank them for his reception. His eyes glanced proudly over the warlike assembly, with an expression

of delight that spoke more forcibly than words. "They are mine—all that I gaze upon is mine! Earth, and its wealth! The sea—the broad, deep, ever rolling sea, and all it bears upon its boundless breast, are mine!—Birds, beasts, trees, flowers, and man—all live and breathe, but at my lordly will! Oh, glorious gods!" he cried aloud, "how do I thank ye for this noble gift—the only one that could content my soul!"—But a look from Burrhus checked his ill-timed apostrophe, reminding him that too much exultation before his people's eyes might be considered as an evil omen; and cautioned him to act with modesty, and apparent thankfulness to them, whose eyes were fixed upon him as their leading star. Nero bowed gracefully to his adviser, and shook him warmly by the hand, which being noticed by the people, loud and continued cheering followed, as he placed himself in his splendid

lectica, and gave the order for returning to the palace.

Upon reaching it he sprang from his litter, and rushing up the steps of the portico, was received in the arms of his delighted mother, who stood there ready to welcome his return, attended by Octavia, Britannicus, and her most intimate friends.

"'Tis mine," he exclaimed, straining her to his breast, "the envied post is mine! the throne of empire is your happy son's. Octavia, thou art an Empress—Empress of mighty and *Eternal Rome!*"

Agrippina kissed him affectionately, and falling upon her knees sent up a prayer to the gods for his success, that he might reign in all the hearts of Rome and triumph over her enemies.

"Make them," she cried, "fly before his armies as the desert's sands roll before the fury of the burning wind!"

Octavia stood with her eyes fixed upon the marble step, as if unconscious of his presence. Her father's death and the injustice done to her brother occupied all her thoughts, until Nero addressing her observed, that she did not appear to share in the general joy. At this rebuke she endeavoured to rally her spirits, and assured him, that whatever tended to encrease his happiness she felt it her duty to be thankful for; although she wished it could have been achieved without injury to others."—Her eyes involuntarily met those of Britannicus, and the expression that passed between the sister and her brother did not escape the jealous eye of Nero, but muttering something between his teeth, he took the hand of the now Ex-Empress, and entered the grand saloon of the palace.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Ambition! Oh, Ambition! If I've done
For thee things great and well—shall
Fortune now forsake me?———
Why have I thus bustled in the world,
Through various and uncertain Fortune hurl'd,
But to be great, unequall'd, and alone?"

Otway.

AGRIPPINA, in persuading Claudius to adopt Nero, imagined she beheld, in embryo, the time when she would manage the reins of government without a rival, and while he bore the *name* of Emperor *she* would, in reality, be the ruler of the empire and of him. No sooner therefore was he invested with his new

dignity than she commenced an arbitrary sway, and instead of winning the hearts of his subjects by kindness, preferred to govern with a rod of terror.

The first act of her despotism was created by her fear of Junius Silanus, (the brother of the unfortunate Lucius) who was at this time proconsul for Asia; a man of intrigue and of daring character, upon whom, conscious of the hatred she deserved from him, she constantly kept a jealous eye. His death was determined upon. Fear, in some breasts, is the parent of crime, as well as hate; in her's both were prolific. But to carry her design into execution needed secrecy and determination. Fidelity she could command by the power of gold or the fear of her displeasure. She selected a man whose fortune had been ruined by gaming and dissipation; he bore the rank of a Roman knight, and had frequently petitioned Agrippina for her interest

to obtain him some situation under government. Having summoned him to her presence she fed his avarice with hopes of a liberal reward, and engaged him to remove the object from whom she had reason to apprehend much danger. On dismissing him from her presence, she said,—"You acknowledge, and I do not doubt your word, that the recompense I have offered for your services exceeds what were your most sanguine expectations. I wish you to rest assured of my sincerity when I say, should you ever betray the confidence I repose in you, your head shall pay the forfeit of your *treachery*."

This instrument, with the assistance of an enfranchised slave, whom he engaged to assist him in the work of death, set out upon his dreadful mission, which, having too successfully accomplished, and received the wages of guilt, he hid himself from the world and died in solitude.

Junius Silanus being thus disposed of, she

was at liberty to turn her vengeance upon Narcissus; against whom her hatred broke out with double fury, now that she had the power to inflict punishment without rendering an account of her actions.

CHAPTER IX.

" Upon that thought and not on food I fed:
Upon that thought and not on sleep I rested:
I come to do the deed which must be done,
Nor thou, nor sheltering angels shall prevent it."

Maturin.

" WELL, Anaxicrates?" said the gloomy Locusta, as he entered the apartment in haste, " what is the cause of your expedition?"

" A messenger from the Lady Silana is without," replied he, rubbing his hands with joy, " I'll warrant there is brave work for us, by her requesting you to visit her in such a hurry."

" What would the withered wanton with me? A whim of jealousy I suppose has roused

her to seek the death of some gallant, whose appetite is not keen enough to feed on food so tough. Well, she must await my leisure. But that I have vowed eternal hatred to mankind I could pity the victims of so base a thing as she is—a cast-off wife—obscene in her desires, and faded in her form—seeking for infamy, and yet unable, from her age, to obtain it—cruel and avaricious—the scourge of beauty and the grave of wealth.—Fah! what a wretch to crawl upon the earth; burthensome to herself and hateful to others. She fancies me her instrument—but she is mine—all, all are mine, who pay me for the vengeance that I take upon the hated race, until their own turns come; and thus I make whole hecatombs of dead, and feed the greedy hate which, like a famished tiger, knaws my heart."

"You must have been greatly injured, being so remorseless?"

"I have."

"And so have I; there's not an urchin that I pass, but mews and chatters at me like an ape — mimicks my length of arm, huge head, and hump, bursting with laughter at my ill-proportioned body. And then the pampered pets of quality, and painted ladies of the city turn up their noses when they look at me, or start with fright, as though an adder or some other loathsome reptile lay in their path—and they shall find my sting—have found it! Last night, a woman met me in the streets, screamed, fainted and miscarried, ha! ha! ha! I would that I could find a female like myself who would breed well, so that I might place our youngsters at the corner of every street, to cheat the patricians of their expected heirs, in the same manner. Why, even that pigmy I chastised at Fucinus has the impudence to reflect upon my person, and call me filthy names—but I have

found the means to be revenged on him!—the prating fool, to turn against his friend, as I was, and fall love-sick with Acerronia."

"Have you carried the potion as I directed you?"

"Yes."

"When will it be administered?"

"To-night."

"'Tis well.—There is no crime in snatching the wretched from their misery—'tis kindness, any thing but sin—she is my debtor.—Whom have you chosen to present it to her?"

"Even her doating swain—the love-sick Camillus, the dolt, whose vanity has turned his brain! and I have instructed a slave to drop the poison in the cup unseen.—The Emperor will see it done himself, he is too impatient for her death, to suffer a chance to interfere, I'll be there likewise—how will Camillus rave and dance with grief, when he be-

holds his mistress dying before him, and hears her accuse him as her murderer.—Ho! ho! ho!"

"Poor girl! I almost wish to save her—but that were cruelty—no, let her die—the hour of retribution will arrive, although she cannot live to witness it. This deed is the first ripple on the sea of crime, which soon will swell into gigantic billows, and touch the heavens with its crimson foam. Go on, young ruler, as thou hast begun, I can in fancy see thee at the goal."

"But remember, mistress, you have to visit Silana—the would-be wife—she is impatient to see you—I've tried the poison upon a beggar's brat, and it is ready for your purpose—you'll need it I'm certain."

"Not now—that woman must not be obeyed; her own life is bargained for; and the person

whom she wishes to destroy is the only being *I* wish to preserve."

"And who can that be, mistress?"

"No less a person than the mother of our Emperor, good Anaxicrates."

"What! would you preserve her who paid your services with imprisonment, black bread, and cold water, and offered you the bow-string for a necklace? I only wish I had an opportunity, and I would despatch her with as little compunction as I should feel in flaying a senator. The worst of it is, I should do an act of justice and benefit mankind, and that thought might cause some qualms of conscience to rise within me; however, I would overcome them to compass my revenge. She had me tossed in a blanket, dragged through a pond, and placed upon a pole to dry again, where I sat like a monkey chained, the scoff and ridicule of all the scullions in the kitchen, and all because her

mightiness was angry, and could find nothing better to vent her spleen upon than unlucky *I*, who happened in the evil moment to cross her path. If I forgive her, may my ugliness desert me, and good will to mankind take possession of me."

"You must abandon all thoughts of harming her for the present, or else abandon me."

"Nay then, let her live, it would break my heart to loose you, mistress."

"I will reward thee, and the cruelty of thy disposition shall be rewarded with a spectacle, by which it may be gratified to the utmost.—The fall of the luxurious Sejanus shall be outdone by his, who little fancied, when he and his accursed associates, brought death and dishonor to my father's house, how high a station I should hold hereafter,—he will not recognise in me, the terror of his race, the simple maid he once thought both fair and gentle.—

Ah, these are thoughts I would willingly banish from my memory, but for the sake of nursing my sluggish and sometimes wavering feelings of revenge.

"Why, this is the first time I ever heard of your being in love!—ho, ho, ho! I must laugh, though you should scourge me for it with rods of iron.—It must be a long time ago, you are wonderfully altered for the worse—I should never have accused your face of having been handsome, if you had not said so."

"Misery has altered it—poverty tended to emaciate my form—tears dimmed the lustre of my youthful eyes—and sobs of anguish ruined the sweetness of my voice! The days of vanity have long since left me, and I may be believed. Yet cannot I help reflecting upon what I was when in the smooth still lake I look and see that which I have become; nor think upon the days of innocence,

and not curse the wretch who plunged me into the abyss of guilt! His hour is almost come!"

"And who is it in whom you take so much interest?"

"One I have hovered about for many a year. To whom, unknown, I have been a fearful scourge; but who shall shortly recognise me in an hour when ——. One who pursued me to the gulf of madness, and would have plunged me into its dark abyss, but the gods held me as my frantic foot stood on the dreadful brink! Such a man needs not a name—I never breathed it since that fatal moment—I never will again—it would sear my tongue, and deprive it of the use for which it was given. Leave me, and hasten to the palace!"

CHAPTER X.

"To each sad night succeeds a gloomy morrow,
And still 'tis hopeless love and endless sorrow."

Shakspeare.

ACERRONIA, a prey to her own thoughts, could never be prevailed upon to reveal the cause of her distress, although repeatedly questioned by Octavia. Deep shame fettered her tongue—and she preferred to let the slow consuming fire of grief feed upon her life, rather than cause inquietude in the breast of her friend. A settled melancholy had taken pos-

session of her; she seldom smiled, unless it was to banish some train of gloomy reflections from the mind of her benefactress, and then it was but faintly—like a stray moon-beam breaking through clouds over the darkened waters of some gloomy loch, sweet for a moment to the eye, but lost too suddenly. It is a pitiful sight to see a young and lovely creature fade day by day, like a flower that feels the canker's tooth feeding upon its core, without the power to shake the insect off; but still destined to endure pangs worse than death, without the bliss of dying! And the poor page, whose hopeless passion caused the laughter of the thoughtless, and the pity of the good, would sit for hours by her side, sigh when she sighed, weep when she wept, and never leave her except to execute his mistress' orders, which having performed, he would replace the cushion at her feet, and resume his seat before the deity of his

adoration. Acerronia witnessed his attachment, but attributed it to a different feeling than love—gratitude, she thought, for her kindness was the cause of his unwearied attention; and thinking thus, she hourly inflicted pangs, by granting him familiarities she would have withheld, had the true state of his heart been known to her. He would frequently waken her from her reveries by printing a kiss upon her hand, as it hung motionless by her side, and moistening it with a tear; and when she drew it from him, stand apart, in mournful silence, until she called him to her side, or sent him upon some errand—then, like a bird he flew to obey her. If she offered him gold, he would look at it for a moment, then at the giver; and, replacing it respectfully in her hand, request her not to tarnish the disinterestedness of his service, by offering him a pecuniary reward. Agrippina regarded him with kindness

for his attachment to her favourite, and saw with real concern how much he suffered from a passion, so perfectly hopeless. As, however, he had never revealed it to the object, and she was ignorant of its existence; she thought it best not to withdraw from her so agreeable a companion, who rendered himself useful at times by diverting her melancholy, and always attending to her wishes with a promptness no other attendant could offer. One evening Acerronia was watching the sun-set, when the page approached her, and, pointing to the descending orb, observed how far more beautiful he thought it shorn of its beams than in its meridian glory, which dazzled all who dared to gaze upon it. "We may now look upon it with delight," continued he, "as it descends in that gorgeous pavilion of clouds. How charming is that aerial landscape—hills, valleys, cities, and palaces, appear in the bright

gold and purple vapours, charming us with a heavenly picture of the earth. See what a flood of golden light rolls over the green summit of yonder grove, which, aided by the evening breeze, bows to the declining god in gratitude for one more happy day. The last beam lingers on the horizon, and darkness mingles with the light of day. The clouds have lost their purple beauty, and are no longer bright. He is gone."

"It was a lovely sun-set," said Accronia.

"But a more beautiful one is yet to come," he replied, "which, far from yielding pleasure to my heart, will make it desolate and sorrowful."

"What do you mean?"

"When you depart, the light that gladdens my existence leaves me."

"Fye, Camillus! you must not become a flatterer."

"Speak I like one who flatters? If so, my

tongue belies my heart. He who can dwell beside the object of his adoration, cursed with a hopeless passion for her, which like a subtle fire consumes him slowly, without revealing the torment he endures, may worship but cannot flatter."

"How?" exclaimed Acerronia, in a tone of surprise, as a sudden light broke in upon her mind.

"I say," continued he hastily, as if eager to do away with what he had unguardedly spoken, "that even such a one would be as little calculated for a flatterer as myself."

"A lover flatters without knowing it—for in his eyes his mistress surpasses the rest of women, and what he *says* he *thinks;* but others, who view her with unimpassioned looks, perceive the faults that are concealed from him. Love is blind to every thing, but the merits of

its object, and would hate the person who untied the bandage."

"True; it is a blissful ignorance. Yet there are some who, in a heavenly form, contain a mind as spotless as the untrodden snow, whose virgin love would more than recompense a man for years of misery."

"Are there? Yes, yes! I hope there are; I am sure there are!"—and she wiped a tear away as she uttered the words.

"And you are the kindest, purest, brightest! Oh, matchless lady! do not look angrily upon me. I have long endeavoured to keep the secret of my love fast locked within my breast, but I find the struggle more than I can endure. Then hear me, while I breathe my madness and presumption—hear me, and kill me."

"Good gods!" exclaimed the astonished girl,

as she stepped backwards from the kneeling dwarf, "What do you mean?"

After a painful pause he replied—"Cannot you read it in my very silence? Have you not heard it in my ceaseless sighs—felt it in every pressure of my hand—seen it in every look."

"Seen what?"

"My adoration for your peerless self;—nay, do not fly from me," he cried as she was about to quit the room, "have pity upon the agony I suffer. I know my imprudent confession deserves your anger, your contempt; but I could no longer conceal the passion that preys upon my life. Pity my sufferings, and let me read forgiveness in your eyes;—do not banish me from your presence, for a fault your own perfections caused. I now lay my heart before you, that citadel in which you reign. To me, earth has no joy, but still to look upon you—death has no terror, but that of separating me from

you. To banish me would be the refinement of cruelty, and *you* were never *cruel.* You will let me still watch your steps, anticipate your wishes, supply your wants, behold you smile, even though upon another's love. You shall not be again offended with my speech—my lips from this moment shall be sealed for ever upon the fatal theme, and I will content myself with the thought, that you are sure *I love you!*—Forgive and pity me."

This rhapsody was uttered with such wonderful rapidity that Acerronia had not time to recover from her surprise before it was concluded.—The self-tortured being at her feet did not fail to excite her pity—his tears, his agitation, and the hopeless passion he cherished, which was visible in every look, had their influence upon her nature, and she assured him that he was forgiven, but endeavoured to point out the folly of his visionary hopes, while she

promised him her friendship and esteem; and peremptorily though kindly insisted upon his withdrawing himself from court. She offered to supply his wants during his absence, with the money allowed her by Agrippina, whom she would apply to for leave of absence for him.

"Travel," said she, "the world has many objects to gratify a mind so intelligent and sensitive as yours—make mankind and their various works your study, and by your return the cause of your uneasiness will be removed. And now, my pretty page, be good enough to bring me the draught Agrippina fancies will restore my strength and health—Alas, she has yet to learn that no medicine can cure diseases of the mind."

The dwarf hastened to execute her commands, and Acerronia seating herself upon a couch, called a favourite greyhound to her side, and amused herself with his gambols until the

return of Camillus, who entered the room with much agitation and aparent alarm.

"I feel a terrible foreboding," said he, "of some approaching calamity—a frightful vision quitted the ante-room as I entered it to procure your beverage, and I feel convinced that my mortal enemy is preparing for my destruction."

"Whom do you mean?"

"That child of sin, Anaxicrates, glided like a shadow out of one door, as I appeared at the other—wherever he is, sin is—he hates me because I will not aid him in some wild scheme of vengeance, which I do not understand, but think him mad—I expect some treason is at work within the palace—his presence bodes no good."

"Did you not ask of those within what occasion brought him?"

"I did—and they told me the Emperor had been closeted with him—I dared not ask any

further questions, but I fear some fatal event is at hand."

"Then your departure must be hastened—I would not have you, my kind friend, remain a moment where you fancy there is danger;—prepare for quitting the city at sun-rise, in the morning. I shall be up, and ready to receive you in my cabinet, to present you with what will be necessary for your journey. Take your farewell of your mistress, this evening, whom I will take care to prepare for your disclosure, and do not think me unkind in expediting your departure—it is to free you from many dangers, that threaten both your personal safety and peace of mind."

"Tears prevented his replying,—and Accronia, anxious to put an end to the painful scene, rose to depart, lifting at the same moment the goblet to her lips, which Camillus had brought for her, but as she was about to drink

the greyhound, with a playful leap dashed it from her hand, and the contents were spilt upon the floor, which the animal began to lap, but, almost upon the instant, fell with a howl of agony, and expired at the feet of his astonished mistress. The page stood aghast and motionless, until, looking in the face of Acerronia, he beheld the look of mild reproach, which seemed to tax him with a knowledge of the contents,—then, with a motion as quick as thought, he snatched a jewelled poinard from his side, and plunged it in his breast! a shriek from the terrified girl, brought in several attendants, who stood lost in wonder at the tragic scene before them. Camillus, as he lay dying at the feet of Acerronia, exclaimed — "You thought me treacherous, beloved mistress of my soul, let this last act remove your doubts at once—I could not live while you believed me guilty, but death is bliss, if I can thus convince you of

my innocence.—Forgive me for the crime of loving you, and think of me with kindness when I am no more, since by this act I have freed you, from the presence of one who loved too well to live exiled from the object of his passion. Let me breathe out my spirit upon that hand—thanks—thanks!"

Camillus fainted, and was borne from the apartment, while Acerronia hastened to her patroness to relate the circumstance, and find relief from the painful thoughts that tormented her, in the bosom of friendship.

CHAPTER XI.

"I tell thee viceroy this day I have seen Revenge—
And in that sight have grown a prouder Monarch,
Than ever sat under the crown of Spain."
Spanish Tragedy.

In a dreary apartment, through which the cold draughts swept, and chilled him to the heart, sat the once proud Narcissus. The once favoured, but now persecuted child of fortune! His head rested upon his hands, his elbows upon his knees, and a gloomy expression pervaded his features, which spoke of lost happiness and blighted hopes. He felt that the earth

and its enjoyments could no longer administer pleasure to his existence—his reign was over! —nor could he discover in the dim vista of futurity one ray of comfort—all was dark and dreadful! power was lost, and the dreams of future splendour he once was haunted by, had vanished like the false mirage from the eye of the thirsting traveller,—the hour of sorrow had overtaken him, an hour he never anticipated in the delusive flattery of success. He now reflected upon his past actions, and blushed to remember how little he had done to merit his own esteem—the acts of injustice he so often committed, now rose like spectres to his affrighted imagination, and he trembled at the enormities he had been guilty of towards his fellow-mortals.

There is no death, by poison, sword or cord, that is not preferable to rayless, hopeless solitude; where the heart feeds upon itself, and the

tongue grows weary of uttering sounds to the same ears, that are also tired with the monotony of its complainings; and the mind ceases to labour because it has no kindred mind to please or to enlighten; no approving voice to cheer it on to toil; no ear to drink its thoughts; no hope but of annihilation! The enemy with whom he wrestled (although a woman) had proved too strong for him; he was overthrown, and only breathed by her permission, and was well aware that her hatred, for the ill offices he had done her with Claudius, would never suffer him to exist; and all he prayed for was a speedy ending to that life which had become so painful a burthen to him.

Since his imprisonment his cheeks had become hollow, his eyes receded under their projecting brows, and shone faintly, like dying lamps at the extremity of some gloomy cavern; his hair, which was of the deepest black was

changed to grey, and he looked but the shadow of the handsome Narcissus, who once governed the mind of Claudius Cæsar. Deprived of human intercourse, he sought friendship with insects, and succeeded in attaching them to him by sharing his scanty allowance with them. Sometimes he would write his thoughts upon the stones of his dreary prison, but the monotonous life he led, rendered the task irksome. It was but to write the same account day after day, altering the style of his relation, as much as possible, until the sentences could no longer be varied. He would then sink into a lethargy, from which the entrance of his rough jailer only aroused him, whose hard heart considered the bounty of a word too much for a fallen favourite.

This life Narcissus led for many months.—At length his jailer neglected to bring him his scanty allowance of bread and water. The first

day he felt this negligence severely, not only because he was compelled to fast; but for the sound of that soldier's footstep, which broke the horrid stillness of his dungeon, and the sight of a fellow creature, whose countenance he studied every day, to find out by the expression of his face if any mercy lingered about his heart—stern as it was, he loved to look upon it, for it was human. "This," thought he, "is surely an unnecessary cruelty; even those who employ him would blame him for this useless affliction. How long a time will it appear before another morning brings him to my prison—I wish I could lie down and sleep till then. How will he reconcile this to his conscience? That man perhaps has been the first to cheer me as I passed along, when fortune smiled upon me. I wonder if he ever thinks of that—when his rough features were dressed in smiles if he could catch a glance

of my eye, and his hoarse voice swelled the loud shout that marshalled my approach.—Men's faces sure are masks given to cheat each other."—Thus would he ruminate, until the shadows of night crept into his solitary cell, and sleep once more relieved him from the pain of reflection.

Morning came—and passed—and evening faded into night—and night gave place to morning, for six successive days—and the wretched captive writhed in the grasp of famine, and his lips cracked with the intolerable heat that raged within him! He endeavoured to cool his tongue against the damp walls that surrounded him, and looked up to the teaming clouds, and prayed for one small drop to penetrate through the iron bars of his prison, but in vain. The wind, inconstant at all other times, was faithful now to the point that prevented their beating in. The gods con-

spired with mortals for his destruction, and in his solitude the voice of despair was heard alone. At the close of the seventh day, he was startled by the sound of a woman's voice—it was celestial music to his ear—and a faint hope rushed to his heart. The voice of woman should never be heard but when it comes to delight the ear, or administer comfort to the torn-hearted. Narcissus endeavoured to rise, and approach the door; but his limbs tottered under him for a step or two, and he fell. But the voice of the woman became louder, and as they approached, he heard her ask the question —"Is he dead?" A reply was given in the negative. "I thank the gods!" said the questioner—"let me behold him once again for the last time, and I shall die in peace!"

"I cannot admit you without"—the rest of the sentence was pronounced in so low a tone, that Narcissus could not hear the words.

"You know this talisman?" said the woman.

"I do, and dare not disobey."

The iron bars fell heavily upon the ground as he spoke, and the harsh sound echoed along the passage—the door opened—and Narcissus sprang up to welcome his visitor, whoever it might be, but as suddenly dropped down again, when he beheld her features filled with an expression that made him shrink with instinctive terror. With a motion of her hand she dismissed the jailer from the room, and seated herself immediately opposite to the famished captive. She gazed upon him as the tigress gloats upon her prey; so singular and terrible was her look, that the question Narcissus would have put died upon his tongue before he could articulate it.

"We meet once more," said she, in a low voice, trembling with emotion, "and at a time when all the golden dreams of juggling life are

vanishing upon the threshold of the grave; and I am she, who for a lapse of years, have followed thy proud galley from afar—I was the speck that on the horizon's verge foretold the approaching hurricane, and growing mightier as I neared the vessel, now overwhelmeth it.—You stare and wonder at my words—no matter—suspense wearies the heart, and renders it an easy prey to the smothered vengeance which is now to burst forth, after slumbering for many years."

"Woman! I know thee not," exclaimed the sufferer—"I am dying—and the most painful of all deaths—a death of famine! If there be in your bosom one spark of humanity, give me a little bread and one poor cup of water, that I may hear thy story to an end, which has so singular a beginning."

The woman heard his supplication, but did not grant it. She proceeded—"You know me

not? None truly know me—and yet there liveth those who once hastened to greet me,—who strewed pleasure in my path, and thought themselves rewarded amply with my smiles. I tell thee, prisoner, there was a time when courtiers bowed before these brows, now wrinkled by affliction and not age, and knelt in homage to the beauty of this face! What think'st thou of it now?"

"As of a thing withered by fortune's spite and not by time, which the dark winter has kept bound within its icy fetters, shut out from the cheering influence of reviving spring. And thou art one with whom the world has hardly dealt, but who could deal more hardly with the world hadst thou the power to do so."

"Humph—a shrewd guesser! I have been what thou has said, a thing upon which the world has poured its phial of bitterness, and *am* the scourge and terror of thy hated race! as

thou may'st feel assured when I inform thee no foot save mine would e'er have been permitted to pass this threshold—no soul but me attend thee at thy death—no voice but mine refuse thy burning lips the moisture they implore!"—Narcissus endeavoured to speak, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and the power of articulation was completely lost!

The woman proceeded—"Thy last moments are approaching—thou man of many sins! and cause of sin in others; and now, while I behold the light fade gradually from thine eyes, I will relate a tale, which shall fill up the time 'twixt this and thy death moment—so carefully will I watch thy fluttering spirit.—At the mouth of the Sarum, which beautiful stream flows into the bay of Neapolis, between the towns of Herculaneum and Pompeii, there resided a happy family, whose wealth consisted of a moderate income, cheerfulness, and con-

tent. *You* may have seen the spot where our little dwelling was situated. It was on a sloping bank, which led down to the margin of a beautiful cove, completely surrounded (save where a narrow creek opened into the sea) by my father's grounds. The house was covered with a profusion of jessamine and rose trees, flowers of the loveliest kind adorned the gardens, and the more stately inhabitants of the wood drooped their pendant branches in the water, or spread their sheltering green arms to shield us from the too great heat of the sun,—nut groves grew down to the water's edge, and here and there a towering cedar reared its majestic head above the rest.—A fountain played constantly before the principal entrance of the villa, the water of which was supplied by a romantic stream, which came bounding along its rugged path from an eminence behind the house, and emptied itself into

the cove below. I am particular in describing this once lovely spot, for you may, perhaps, recall one to your memory which resembles it. The family who resided here consisted of an old man, bent with the weight of honourable years, but cheerful in his mind as the young birds, that roused him before the sun was up with their untutored melody, to pour forth his devotions to the gods, and pray that the coming day might pass as cheerfully and innocently as those that had preceded it. He had three sons, two were fighting their country's battles, and the third remained at home, preferring the calm life of an agriculturist to the bustle of the city, or the vicissitudes of a military career. There were three daughters, young, affectionate, and handsome, they resided with their father, who was a widower. The story seems to interest you."

An expression of painful recollection animated

the face of Narcissus while she spoke, and a smile of mockery curled the lip of the narrator. After a slight pause, she continued—

"We were happy. One evening a pleasure-boat, seeking refuge from a sudden storm that swept into the bay, steered into our little cove for shelter; and a young man, of graceful deportment, stepped on shore, to solicit our hospitality until the tempest should pass away. It was freely given; and the storm continued to rage with unceasing violence. Apartments were provided for himself and for his friends—we were charmed with their conversation—the evening passed gaily, and we retired to rest.—I was startled from my sleep by hearing a loud noise in my youngest sister's apartment, and at the same instant found myself fast locked in a man's embrace. I shrieked for help, but he laughed—laughed at my anguish!—avowed his passion for me, and vowed to act the part Tar-

quinius played ; or, failing, execute the threat which subdued the courage of Lucretia. With strength, which madness alone could have endowed me with, I freed myself from his grasp, and rushed out of the room to the apartments of my sisters. Near the outside of the door lay my murdered brother!—my sisters were gone ; but on the bed of the youngest, his favourite, was extended the corpse of my heart-broken father! Think what I suffered—alone and friendless in the house where, a few hours before, all whom I loved were assembled! The villain who pursued me to the chamber turned coward at the sight, and fled. I knelt down by my dead father's side, and vowed to revenge the outrage. Two of the villains have already paid the penalty of their crime, and the last ray of life is fading fast from the starting eyes of the third! Shall I now tell my name? It is Junia Calphurnia!!"

The wretched victim closed his eyes in death as she pronounced the name, while she proceeded, uttering her thoughts aloud, in a hollow voice.

"And art thou gone, Narcissus! I have waited long and patiently for this hour of retribution—have clogged my soul with sin to work thy downfall—and, to be terrible to *thee*, have become terrible to all mankind. I have watched thy progress since that awful hour, and waited until thou didst achieve the apex of thy pride; then—then I undermined the stately tower, the downfall of which was my aim—the hope of my existence! My father! sisters! ye are now revenged! Farewell to the dark name and occupation of Locusta—a name which shall descend to after ages abhorred, and no one will hear the story of her wrongs—the cause of her deep hatred for mankind. The purpose for which I assumed the appellation is accomplished, and

henceforward this hated form shall never dwell among the haunts of men! Anaxicrates!"

The dwarf entered the dungeon.

"Take up this carrion, and follow me!"

The woman cast one long look of scorn upon the body, and then turned to depart, while the attendant, obeying his mistress' commands, slowly followed her from the dungeon.

CHAPTER XII.

"Was it not sufficient to behold the fire, and warm thee; but, with Satyrus, thou must kiss the fire and burn thee?"

Alexander and Campaspe.

Nero, securely seated upon his throne, gave himself up to luxury and the cultivation of the fine arts. Poetry, painting and music found in him a liberal patron, and a new morning appeared to dawn upon the darkness in which the nation had been enveloped since the reign of Augustus. Prizes were given to the most skilful votaries of the muses, and he inspired them with

an enthusiasm nearly equal to his own, by distributing among his courtiers specimens of his own ability in various compositions. The harp, his favorite instrument, was never touched by a more skilful finger, and he would amuse himself with it for hours together, enraptured with the music he extracted from its chords.

Agrippina was glad of this, for it enabled her to guide the helm of state, and rule the ruler. So insatiable was her love of power, so entirely did she render herself up to its influence, and so little pains were taken to conceal her inclination, that the senate began to tremble for the fate of Rome. The murder of Junius Silanus, and the fate of Narcissus, were fearful warnings to those who wished to oppose her will; nor could the solicitations of Seneca and Burrhus reclaim their pupil from the effeminacy and debauchery into which he had plunged.

Nero's dislike to Britannicus had increased to

positive hatred, and he constantly sought for occasions to insult him; while Agrippina, by kindness and attention, endeavoured to win his good opinion. Kindness from such a being, whose every word was eagerly caught up, whose smile was looked for with as much eagerness as the light of morning, after the gloom of midnight, whose frown was far more ominous of ill than any foreboding gathered from the stars, or soothsayer's predictions—persevering kindness from her had a powerful influence upon the mind of Britannicus, when there appeared no positive reason for assuming it, and his former dislike (ignorant as he was of the part she had played in the murder of his father) lessened for her as his resentment gradually encreased toward her imperious son. He no longer avoided her presence, but found pleasure in the charm of her conversation, as it revealed her powerful intellect, which, to every subject, gave addi-

tional interest—her instructions were invaluable—the morality of conduct she exacted in the circle of her family was rigid as her intriguing character in the state was indefatigable—she was, in fact, a being possessed of a thousand guilty passions, (subservient all to her ambition, which was the ruling one) with many virtuous qualities in the back ground of the picture, which at times were brought forward vividly, and rendered her the idol of her immediate friends, and the terror of the worthless and profane. It appeared as if she had determined that no one should have the exclusive power of doing wrong but herself, and those whom she employed to aid her political views. This extraordinary mixture of good and evil, added to her strength of mind and accurate knowledge of the human heart, gave her the ascendancy over her enemies, and gained a host of partizans—the Senate feared her—the army admired

her—and both obeyed her. At last the riots and debaucheries of her son became the common topic of the day; and spies from every quarter of the city brought her intelligence of the general discontent of the people caused by the midnight outrages of Nero, and his dissolute companions. She feared, at length, that some plot might be laid to revenge their injuries, for many citizens had fallen in these midnight brawls; and, reflecting upon the perils he encountered by such unjustifiable proceedings, censured him severely for his disgraceful conduct. Her eagerness to reclaim him from such pursuits, led her into the error of commanding where policy required her to entreat. Instead of striving to stop the wild steed in his furious course at once, she should have humoured him into gentleness; but feelings of authority were predominant, and she forgot, while she endeavoured to curb his licentiousness, that her son was now her Emperor, and

thus she lost, by violence, the influence mildness might have preserved, at least for a time. The respect with which he had hitherto treated her gradually diminished, and his treatment of Octavia became daily more indifferent; this grieved her—for she looked upon herself as the original cause of Octavia's unhappiness, in forwarding her marriage with Nero; and in order to make, if possible, some atonement for the wrong she had committed, it was her constant endeavour to impress upon his mind the advantages he had gained by the union, and the many virtues Octavia possessed, which entitled her to his respect and admiration.

But Nero became weary of these lectures, which, instead of drawing him from his disgraceful pleasures, tended to increase them.—Angry accusations and irritable retaliations were the consequence, and Agrippina beheld the commencement of her own downfall. A

report of an attachment he had formed for an actress, by the name of Acté, raised her indignation to the highest pitch. She trembled at the power this favourite might exert over his mind, and determined by force or artifice to banish her from his presence.

One evening Nero, heated with the excesses of the banquet, retired to a private apartment earlier than usual. The walls of this delightful room were formed of the most beautiful Grecian marble, brought from the celebrated quarry on Mount Pentelicus, near Athens, adorned with various devices from the fabulous history of the Greeks, &c. and executed by the finest sculptors and artists. The splendid ceiling was supported by twelve columns of Parian marble, of the Ionian order; in the centre appeared a groupe of figures, beautifully chiselled, representing the contest between Ænomaus and Pelops in the chariot race at Olympia, at which

Jupiter presided—on the right hand of the god was Ænomaus, with his wife Sterope, a daughter of Atlas; and at the heads of the four steeds harnessed to his chariot, stood his charioteer, the treacherous Myrtillus, and two grooms in attendance. In this corner of the picture was seen the river Cladeus. Upon the left of Jupiter, stood Pelops and Hippodamia, with the chariot, horses, charioteer, and groom; and in the left corner the river Alpheus. This subject was copied by Phidias from the original, in the temple of Jupiter, at Olympia; it engrossed the entire centre of the ceiling, and upon each side of it were two other subjects. The first comprised a number of figures, representing the various exercises of the Olympiè games; the second was the spirited subject of Hercules, and his band of warriors, overcoming the Amazons, with Theseus fighting by his side.—On the right hand wall of the apartment, was

a painting, supposed to have been executed by Panænus, the brother of Phidias, which four hundred years had been unable to deprive of its beautiful tints—Jupiter at war with the Titans. This was supported by two smaller ones, expressive of the trials of skill between Apollo and Mars with the Cæstus, and Mercury in the foot-race, in both of which games Apollo appeared as the victor. On the opposite side was a beautiful enamel of the fate of Prometheus. He was stretched upon his back, and chained to the rock, with a vulture perched upon his breast, which was laid open, and bleeding profusely. The face of Prometheus expressed the agony he endured, and one shackled hand was lifted up to Heaven, as if to deprecate its anger; while Hercules stood over them, with his club upraised, as if about to slay the vulture. At the upper end of the room a contrivance had been made, to waft de-

licious perfumes through it, at regular periods. The cornices reflected a glare of light, from the various devices of precious stones that enriched them. Vases of the most costly workmanship, filled with aromatic plants and flowers, were placed around; and goblets, formed from the solid topaz, or more precious ruby. All that could fascinate the eye, and gratify the senses, were collected in this emporium of earth's treasures; but these were common to the eyes of Nero, and, having lost their novelty, were no longer valued. Possession robs the fairest treasure of its charms, with those who, unrestrained, can always cull the first bright flower their fickle fancies covet.

Nero flung himself impatiently into a chair, and angrily enquired of his attendants, if Claudius Senecio had been to ask for him; a reply being given in the negative, he arose, and walked with rapidity backwards and for-

wards, pausing frequently to listen for the footstep of that minister to his pleasure. At length, infuriated by the unlooked-for delay, he flung a chrystal goblet, of immense value, at the head of an attendant, against which it burst into a thousand fragments—bidding him to go and watch for the appearance of Senecio, and give him the earliest information of his approach. The unfortunate wretch departed, and his imperious master taking up a lyre, endeavoured to appease the tumult in his mind with music, but in vain; even that was thrown aside, and he was about to summon his gladiators to attend him in a night ramble through the city, when the door opened, and Senecio entered, leading a female, who advanced trembling into the august presence. The pallium was drawn so closely round her features, that not one of them could be recognised; but the jewel which glittered upon her delicate finger, instantly

caught the searching eyes of Nero, and before she had time to unveil, the Emperor of Rome was at her feet! That powerful command of language, which formerly gained him the applause of the wise, and the gratitude of thousands, when, first appearing as an advocate, he redressed the wrongs of Ilium, and banished sorrow from the Bolognians,—now used in the more heart-felt cause of love, was irresistible. The lovely Acté, (for she it was) heard his passionate vows, believed them, and loved the man more than the Emperor. Her outward garment thrown aside, revealed the perfect symmetry of her figure, and the exquisite loveliness of her face, both of which partook more of the related beauty possessed by the divinities, than any thing he had hitherto beheld—while his apparent devotion flattered her most ambitious hopes. With a trembling hand, he led her to a seat beside him—there was a melo-

dious softness in his expressions, a refinement of address, novel even to Acté, accustomed as she had been to the conversation and admiration of the patricians. Her wit in turn, tinctured with a softness created by the happiness she felt in the society of her Imperial admirer, illumined the conversation, and dazzled the mind as it penetrated the heart.

The pleasure quaffed in this first interview, was not permitted to pass without a considerable mixture of uneasiness, for scarcely had an hour elapsed, when suddenly, as if she had descended through the roof, Agrippina stood before them! So swiftly did she hurry into the centre of the apartment, that her son, who was kneeling at the feet of Acté, had not time to rise, before the offensive accents of maternal authority rang in his ears. An expression of resentment crossed his brows as he glanced upon the unwelcome visitor, and striking a gong, six

handmaidens entered the apartment, who conducted the terrified Acte from the scene of anger, but by a different door to that by which she entered.

"And now, madam," exclaimed the indignant Prince, "permit me to know the pressing business that has caused you thus to break in upon my privacy!—I thought my midnight hours, at least, might be my own, and that the Emperor's desires claimed some regard even from a mother's persecution."

Agrippina, who, during her son's address, stood in the centre of the apartment, now seated herself, and motioned Nero to follow her example.

"I have of late," she said, "perceived an alteration in you, which gives my heart much anguish. A studied coldness, or a pettish anger, is now the usual welcome I receive, and my approach, is met by insolence and

criminal contempt. If I had been less instrumental to the aggrandisement of Domitius Ænobarbus; had I, instead of elevating him to the imperial throne, permitted him to pass his life in the quiescent and inglorious station from which I snatched him, I should not wonder at his forgetfulness of man's first duty, honour to his parent. But when my son through my means—mine alone! has reached the highest pinnacle of greatness;—when, yet a boy, he towers above the clouds, and from on high surveys the subject world!—when he, brute-like, fleshеth his youthful fangs in the fond breast that cherished him, it seems more strange than wildest fables are, and makes me almost think some juggling seer, hath changed my true-born offspring for a churl, who never sucked the milk my bosom yielded!"

The eyes of Nero sought the ground at this

rebuke, but he made no reply, and Agrippina, after a moment's pause, continued.

"Had it not been for your sake, my name would have been handed down to posterity unsullied by a crime—for you I laboured, and for you I sinned—for you I've braved the anger of the Gods! which, soon or late, will fall upon my head, and thus you recompense me!—My counsel which has made you what you are, is now unheeded, and you are open only to the falsehoods which my enemies pour like a river into your thirsty ears. The traitor Burrhus, and that wheedling pedant, (whom I redeemed from banishment, with the false hope that he would train your mind to nobleness,) are striving to uproot all filial love and reverence from your heart—to turn it against me—me, whose days are passed in labour for your welfare, whose nights are spent in care and thoughtfulness, for the en-

creasing grandeur of my child! Ungrateful offspring! is a mother's heart a thing so valueless, that it may lie in the open common way for every base-born slave to trample on?—and are you so cruel, so wholly lost to all the better feelings of mankind, as to be accessary to their shameful schemes?—shame upon thee, Nero! I would not have the world convict thee of so black a sin!"

The chidden Emperor lifted up his head—a look of powerful meaning darted from his eyes, as he fixed them upon the face of his mother—he then arose, and said:

"I am not ignorant, madam, of the favours you have showered upon me—even from the time when you returned from banishment, and took me from the protecting care and gentle guidance of my poor aunt, Lepida, who, whatever were her faults, was kind to me in poverty and in affluence,—no stern forbidding

looks were cast upon me, no angry words to shock my ears were ever uttered by her,—she loved me and deserved my gratitude—but she was sacrificed!—sacrificed!!—and by whom? —poor aunt!"

"She merited her fate," exclaimed his mother, with some emotion, "she dealt with witches and with sorcerers, and by the forbidden aid of magic, and assisting friends, aspired to the throne—my right, by the free choice of Claudius—which, if I had not obtained, thy head would ne'er have worn the laurel wreath."

"How can I value it, madam?" he replied, "when all its attributes are crippled by a mother's arbitrary sway. I'd rather bind my temples with thorns, and perish like the Hebrew on the cross, than have my actions and desires subject to constant rebuke and opposition.—What is the value of my dignity, if I am to appear in the eyes of all my subjects, a puppet,

an infant, unfit to walk alone, and trusted only in my leading strings? I will be *all* or *nothing!* Treat me no longer like an offending *child!*—The dignity to which I am raised, I will support—it shall no longer be subservient to the persecuting tyranny even of a reproachful mother!"

Agrippina fixed her full dark eyes upon the face of her son, and, in a mournful voice, uttered the name of "Octavia!" A flush of shame passed over the face of Nero, when the neglected partner of his greatness was mentioned, which Agrippina noticed, and continued:

"By my contrivance was that injured creature torn from the arms of the man she loved, who killed himself upon the fatal day your marriage was solemnized. I wished for the union, because it was a certain pathway to the people's hearts. If love refused to be present at your nuptials, the misery that hapless wife

endured before she was compelled to share your bed, at least deserves the tribute of respect.—The mild obedience of her spotless life, since that event, demands your gratitude; her lips have never yet rebuked your vices; and is such a being to be neglected, for the embraces of a creature, low-born, low-minded, taken from that class by every other rank of life despised!"

"Despised!" cried the animated Nero, as he struck his hand upon the table near him, which served him for an altar. "By Jupiter! I'll make that persecuted race the envy of the world. The noblest Roman shall be prouder of the Thespian crown, than are the conquerors at *Olympia* of their fadeless laurels; and Acté, —lovely Acté—shall be the bright presiding goddess of that noble science!"

"Thou art no son of mine!" she replied, with indignation sparkling in her eyes. "I never nursed a spirit such as thine! My child

would never have sank so basely low, as to desert a Princess like Octavia for such a wretch—a vile Togata!"

"Hold, madam!" interrupted Nero, impatiently, "there is a boundary which must not be overstepped, even by a mother. Look in her face of beauty—listen to the silver accents of her tongue—observe the graceful motions of her airy form—and tell me, if a being so endowed with nature's choicest gifts, can merit terms so reproachful and degrading?—Madam! she is now beyond the reach of prying envy and malignant tongues—I have taken her to my heart, where she shall reign alone!—As for Octavia, you confess yourself the heart had no influence in our union; it was policy, ambition, any thing but love chained us to each other; then let her take her course—I follow mine!"

At this moment the door opened, and Senecio

and Pallas appeared disputing at the entrance—the one demanded admittance, and the other endeavoured to persuade him from attempting it. Nero started from his recumbent posture—uncontroulable fury was in every feature!—"How now?" cried he, "more intruders upon my privacy—more lecturers! Now, by the Thunderer, this is too much to bear! Senecio! what means this insolence? Pallas! I swear that head of thine is in jeopardy. Death and eternal fires! who am I, slave-born wretch?—Jove! launch thy thunderbolts—and save the dignity of Nero from being violated longer by this audacious man! Hence from my sight!—If I again behold thee, by Plutus, thou shalt die the death of Crassus! Avoid my presence! Senecio! see that he quits the city before day-break; leave him his ill-gotton gain, to revel with in exile."

Pallas, terrified at the wrath of Nero, has-

tened from the chamber, who, with a laugh of derision, followed his retreat to the door, and scornfully exclaimed " Pallas has abdicated!"

The disgrace of her paramour, tore the veil from the eyes of Agrippina—she beheld at once his downfall, and her own. She could no longer hope to exercise any authority over her son. Her power in the state she felt was at an end, and all the stormy passions of her heart rushed into her eyes. She tore the vittæ from her head, and her black hair fell over her figure like a mourning veil, such as were worn at funeral ceremonies; tears of passion gushed from her eyes, which she dashed away as they trickled down her cheeks! At length, falling upon her knees, she addressed herself to Mars, the avenger!

" On thee I call, in my dark hour, thou blood-red deity! and pray for swift annihilation to overtake me, that I may never more

behold the features of that incubus, which this accursed womb brought forth, to haunt me with a life-pursuing plague. Even now there are some well-known voices ringing in my ears, and words of bitterness, in tones remembered, set my brain a whirling. Oh, Ænobarbus! my first husband, well have thy words been verified—'that nought but what was loathsome and pernicious, could spring from such an unblessed bed as ours.' The murdered Passienus quits his tomb, and shakes his bony hands in vengeance at me! The shade of Claudius knits its gloomy brows—the eyes are starting from their hollow spheres, darting upon me their unearthly fires—and countless victims circle me about, and cry for vengeance on the murderess! Claudius! vengeance shall still be thine! The rightful heir reigns in the people's hearts—with my own tongue will I proclaim my guilt—by my own power, shall young Bri-

tannicus ascend the throne nature designed him for. The daughter of Germanicus will seek the camp—the legions will not forget that General who led them on to conquest and to honour. Yes; Agrippina's breath shall raise a flame unquenchable in every veteran's breast, until their lawful Emperor obtain his rights, wrenched from him by my guilty artifice.—Then let the smooth-tongued Seneca, with all the subtle poison of his eloquence, quell, if he can, the fury of men's hearts—that snake, who from despairing exile I lifted up to fortune and to favour, who now, basking in sun-shine, stings the hand that raised him. Or Burrhus, with his maimed and treacherous hand, waive them to fight upon the side of sin. Then shall you see, young tyrant! how vain their blended efforts will prove to aid a fell usurper's cause, who tramples upon holy nature's rights, and spurns the mother, for whom *he* at least should

feel a reverence more deep and lasting than ever filled the hearts of common sons!"

"Madam! I cannot blame your indignation," he replied, sarcastically, "but cannot hear 'the best of mothers' accuse herself of crimes, which would injure her in the eyes of those whose interest she so ardently desires. Consider, madam! how the troops would rave, if they supposed your treachery was the cause of my advancement! Your policy is of too high an order, to suffer your interest to be thrown down by useless passion. Reflect, good mother! and bear in mind, I have been too long the shadow of authority, and will be now the *substance!*—mark me—*will be.* This last act of maternal violence has broken the strong net you twisted round me—the lion is no longer in the toils, but *free* and to be *feared!*"

The last words were uttered in a determined tone, not to be mistaken; and, leaving Agrip-

pina to her reflections, he unceremoniously retired, attended by Senecio. The full heart of the haughty woman rose to her lips, and scalding tears gushed from her eyes! Humbled in spirit, burning for revenge, yet undecided how to act, she stood—stunned with the blow she had received.

"And am I then abandoned—left to scorn—a thing for envy to spit its venom at? Shall those, whom I have held in terror so long, now rear their heads, and dare me to my face?—those whom I hated, treat me with contempt? Great Jove! avert this dark—this fatal change, and give me death at once, since power is gone. And yet it is not gone—at least, not quite gone; I may make the ungrateful boy regret the tears, his proud disdain wrings from me now. For him—for him—Oh! what have I not done for him? Have I not drawn upon my head the curses of mankind—the wrath of

Jove, to whom I madly plead? I have; and thus he pours his vengeance on me! 'Tis just—the being for whose sake I clogged my soul with crime, should be the inflicter of my punishment—it is but justice! Oh, my heart will burst!"

In a paroxysm of grief and anger, she rushed to her private closet, and flung herself upon a couch, a prey to almost insupportable anguish.

CHAPTER XIII.

Let us drain the nectar'd bowl,
Let us raise the song of soul,
To him, the god, who loves so well
The nectar'd bowl, the choral swell ;
Him who instructs the sons of earth
To tread the tangled dance of mirth ;
Him who has nursed with infant love,
And cradled in the Paphian grove ;
Him that the snowy Queen of Charms
Has fondled in her twining arms.

Grasp the bowl, in Nectar sinking ;
Man of sorrow, drown thy thinking !"

Moore's Anacreon.

THE following morning, the sixteenth of December, was the day appointed for keeping the festival of Saturn, the deified monarch of the 'Golden age,' and Rome was one scene of

riot, feasting and debauchery. The very slaves, during the festival, were free from all controul, and plunged into every excess while it lasted. The streets resounded with the laugh of merriment and shouts of "liberty." Dancers and minstrels thronged every avenue; flutes, pipes, and other instruments assailed the ear and lightened the hearts of old and young: it was Nature's holiday, and her children paid her the tribute of smiling faces and happy hearts. Care was forgotten, at least laid aside during the week this festival continued; images of the Deity, in gold, silver, brass and clay, according to the fortunes of his votaries, adorned the feasts of citizens. Folly and beauty went hand in hand as merrily to celebrate the heathen god, as they now caper at the carnival—Reason and sobriety were ridiculed by young and old, and modesty, sweet modesty, the dove-eyed goddess of Rome's earlier days, in Diana's temple, hid

her drooping head, and wept to see her empire so subdued.

A splendid fête was given at the palace of Nero, to which the flower of the young patricians were invited; the table groaned beneath the weight of massy plate and curious viands, and as each course was done with, the whole paraphernalia, as if touched by the hand of a magician, sank beneath the floor, and was replaced by another still more enticing to the appetite. Youths of the most exquisite beauty, and clothed in glittering apparel, in graceful dances glided along the spacious hall, wafting from their feathery fans the most delicious perfumes, and, at a signal given, some exquisite voices sang the following:—

"It is the Saturnalian feast,
The feast of mirth and revelry;
And till the day-God gilds the east
Pass round the wine cup merrily.

"Fill, fill your cups with Chian wine,
To Saturn drain the draught divine,
Drink till soft pleasure fills the soul!
As that bright Nectar fills the bowl.

"For 'tis the Saturnalian feast,
The feast of mirth and revelry;
And till the day-God gilds the east,
Pass round the wine cup merrily."

At the conclusion of the strain, a group of boys and girls, dressed so as to represent the priests and priestesses of the vine-crowned god, rushed into the hall, their looks wild, their cheeks painted to resemble the rosy features of his devotees. The hair of the bacchantes fell upon their necks and swelling bosoms in rich luxuriance, like the glossy plumage of the raven, scattered upon a bank of snow.—Then followed Silenus, leading a train of youthful Satyrs, who, with their various instruments, caused a merry uproar. The reeling dance of

bacchanalian mirth kept up the laughter of the banqueters, at the conclusion of which, the representation of the God entered at the lower end of the hall, seated upon the tawny shoulders of an actor, who performed the part of Pan, and silenced the uproar of the preceding groups, with an inspiring air, to which all the attendant goats, and fawns, capered with joy. Bacchus, after bowing to a golden statue of Saturn, which stood in the centre of the board, sang:——

" Explain noble mortals—the meaning unfold,
Why Saturn is honored with statues of gold,
While I am neglected, the author divine,
Of man's choicest blessing, his generous wine?

" Old Saturn I grant ye is God of the feast,
But let me be worshipped vice-regent at least;
What eye would with pleasure or gaiety shine,
At a festival, wanting my generous wine.

" Besides Saturn and I in the good golden age,
Were the best friends on earth, vide history's page;
He saved a fond mother from early decline,
And I to enrich her first planted the vine.

" Then let Statues of Bacchus with Saturn appear,
To hallow the board and enliven the cheer:
And while to one God-head you quaff the rich wine,
Forget not the other who planted the vine."

This unexpected effusion was received with universal approbation by the company; the omission was atoned for by ordering a splendid statue of Bacchus to be placed at the foot of the table, and a libation to the deity of the Vine was instantly drained by his willing votaries: he was then carried out in triumph upon the shoulders of the woodland god, followed by his numerous train. Various games were then proposed and accepted, each guest selecting that which best suited his inclinations; some preferred the martial game invented by Palamides at the

siege of Troy, and called Latrunculi, a game that bears a strong resemblance to modern chess. Others preferred Ludus tessærarum, but the majority still lingered by the wine cup, and over these Nero presided.

"By Jupiter," he exclaimed, addressing a young nobleman, who was seated on his right hand, the constant companion of his nightly revels, "by Jupiter! I love thee, my Duilius, better than Achilles loved Patroclus; thou art a congenial spirit, and never desert thy goblet or thy friend. In our last conflict with the plebeian dregs thy poniard saved me from a blow that would have put a stop to my night-frolics for ever after, when even my gladiators fled, or fell beside me; that butcher's knife would have despatched thy monarch to the gods, for the knave discovered his Emperor through the disguise, and was angry, forsooth, because I killed his steed! When shall we

have another such night? I love to make the rabble fly, like Parthians, from our Roman pikes, and prick them as they run, to try their speed. I'll pick my runner for the next Olympiad from the fleetest cowards of our midnight sport! What say you, my Duilius? Would it not be a notable way of finding a swift foot to win the *Stadium* crown?"

"The best," replied the favourite, "the wisdom of age is heard in every word you utter—no moment of your life is passed in fruitless pleasures—your mind, for ever on the active wing, gathers from distant countries, as well as from present scenes, a plenteous harvest of golden knowledge. As nothing can escape your observation, even so nothing you find remains useless—your wisdom turns every thing to instant utility."

"Come, come, my Duilius, I must stop your praises, your love renders you blind to my

errors, and glorifies my better qualities too much. You flatter me, and look, Sempronius wears a cloud upon his brow, as if he longed to chide us both—*you* for false praise, and *me* for vanity.—Is it not so, Sempronius?"

"Duilius, Emperor, loves to deal in rhetoric, and calculate the exotics of his fancy — but they, like other plants, will fade—the fairest, perhaps, soonest!—Words are but air, sometimes as sweet and warm as Asia's breath, at others cold as the bleak northern blast.—Truth builds her temple in the hearts of men, who cautiously conceal that part of her form, which is likely to appear least pleasing,—and when Duilius decorates her, the gaudy covering is of such ample size, that not a single feature is discernible."

"Sempronius!" exclaimed a youth at the lower end of the board, "be not, I pray you, too hard upon my friend Duilius—if you wish

to become schoolmaster search for another pupil—his wit is better than a lecture at any time, but now supremely so,—seek out old Seneca, and moralize with him upon the folly of the age, in which men prefer to follow nature's dictates, and partake of the pleasures she presents to them, to sitting like Diogenes in his tub, hating the world, and by the world despised!"

"The cynic knew the world, but the world knew not the cynic," replied Sempronius, "and let me tell you, Aurelius Tullus, that man shows little care for real happiness, who greedily snatches at every lure pleasure spreads before him. He, who at a feast tastes every dish, and gluts his appetite with sweets, can never justly appreciate the viands he consumes; but he who cautiously abstains at times from luxuries, never intended for our common use, and when partaking of them eats sparingly of

each, receives *from* each the enjoyment nature is willing to bestow."

"By the red lip of Pomona!" exclaimed Nero, "while blossoms blow and trees yield fruit, I'll taste earth's sweets; and while they charm me will not permit a base, ungrateful thought to taint the luscious joy they give me. Shall we, while summer brings us warmth and beauty, waste her sweet hours in foolish anticipation of the cold aspect of winter, and shiver, in the warm sunbeams, at the distant frost?—Or shall we, while we gaze upon a lovely woman's cheek, think how that cheek will moulder in the tomb?—No, fill your goblets to the brim—deep be the draught ye drain! Here's to the man, who, while he lives, is the determined foe of care, and the chief favorite at pleasure's feast."

As if it had been preconcerted, every guest started to his feet, and flung his chaplet of

flowers into the sparkling wine, then, grasping their goblets at the same moment, they all shouted the name of 'Nero,' and drained them to the bottom.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the Prince, "you have named the man who answers the description of him I drank, for, while I live, earth shall yield her store of fruits and flowers to delight my mind, and cheer my body, which, when I die, I will reward her with. As he concluded, he drained his cup of Falernian wine—then struck a chord upon his lyre, which, at a signal given, was handed to him by his page, and he sang with great taste as follows—

"Let gloomy minds indignant rail,
When we unfold soft Pleasure's sail,
And, wafted by her perfumed breeze,
Sail fearless on her azure seas;
But let the lightsome heart rejoice,
And listen to her magic voice.

" 'Mid gloomy rocks, in caverns wild
Where never Love or Beauty smiled,
Let Sages sit the live-long day,
And moralize the night away ;
Our days shall pass in God-like glee,
Our nights in nameless extacy.

" Oh, let me like Assyria's King !
Live, love and laugh ! and from the wing
Of pleasure snatch a fadeless plume,
To fan away approaching gloom :
Or like that envied Monarch die,
And deified adorn the sky."

Loud and continued applause, like that which is given at times to a favorite actor in the theatres, followed the conclusion of this song, and with a smile, that fully expressed the pleasure of his heart, he returned the instrument to his attendant.

In the midst of this festivity there was one face destitute of smiles, one heart that felt no joy. Britannicus reclined upon his couch at

the table, lost in thought; and it was only when his cup-bearer announced to him the necessity of partaking in the cheer, that his reverie was banished, and he tasted the diluted beverage with which his cup was at times replenished. For some time past he had been absent and melancholy; his healthful cheek had given place to a pale, care-worn hue. He never began a conversation, and answered questions with a monosyllable or a motion of the head: he wandered among the shrubberies, the personification of melancholy. The boy, who but a few months before laughed care away, now sat disconsolate among the gay, alone amid the multitude. The flashing eyes that sent forth scintillations of delight, now gazed coldly round the joyful circle, without participating in its merriment.

His dejection did not escape the observation of Nero, who, regarding him as a formidable

rival, detested him, and never failed to seize upon an occasion to humble him in the eyes of his associates. Patient in suffering wrong, as he was, careful to avoid being the aggressor, he never attempted to retaliate. He beheld the tide of popular opinion, bearing his rival above opposition upon its shining surface; while he, the rightful heir by blood, was overwhelmed by its velocity and misdirected course, but sought not to overthrow his rival for Octavia's sake, whom he loved with pure and devoted affection.

"And now," said Nero, starting from his recumbent posture, "what say you, gentlemen, to a game of 'Who shall be King?' Britannicus! will you make one?"

"Yes!" he replied, dejectedly.

"If the lot should be yours, I have provided a distaff for you," said the unfeeling scoffer.

The lots were drawn, and whether by acci-

dent or design, the fortune of the lottery fell upon Nero, who reseated himself upon his couch, and issued his orders for the entertainment of the evening.

"Duilius! you shall be the second man in the state, and in order to draw forth entertainment from others, be very agreeable yourself, under penalty of losing my favour. You are a good mimic; so, give us a specimen of your talent—begin!"

The favourite bowed, smiled, and, with a great deal of self confidence, began to mimic the voices and gestures of each individual in the party, not even excepting the two Princes. The melancholy of Britannicus presented food for satire, and he played upon it to the uttermost; for which he was rewarded by loud peals of laughter from Nero, and consequently by most of the company. A smile of contempt curled the lip of Britannicus for a moment,

and then all was calm again. Sempronius was then commanded to amuse the company; and, snatching a sword and buckler from the hands of his servant, he went through the various positions of attack and defence, as taught in the military schools, and was applauded for his skill; and every one endeavoured to make the hours fly pleasantly. At length Nero ordered Britannicus to sing—a task, he thought, which would render him ridiculous in the eyes of all the guests. The youth, who rarely mingled with society, had never been heard to sing by any of the company. He rose up, silently, from his couch, somewhat disconcerted by the suppressed laughter and ill-concealed ridicule; but, recovering his composure, he cast a glance upon them which commanded instant silence, and taking a small instrument from his page to accompany his voice, he sang with dignity and pathos the following—

SONG.

Laugh on—laugh on—'tis mine to bear;
'Tis yours to taunt and jest;
Scoff on, ye beings! void of care—
I bow to Jove's behest!

Remember, 'tis a Prince who sings,
And drop the venom'd dart—
Quick strip it of its envious wings,
And act a noble part!

Remember what I *should* have been—
Am—and perhaps *may be*;
And *that* which now doth intervene,
Between my right and *me!*

Or laugh—laugh on—'tis mine to *bear*;
'Tis yours to taunt and jest;
Scoff on, gay beings! void of care—
I bow to Jove's behest!

There was a pause of some moments at the end of the song—the guests were taken by surprise. So far from thinking Britannicus ca-

pable of performing the task imposed upon him, they had the greatest difficulty in suppressing their laughter, at the supposed absurdity of the command. But when they heard the simple and affecting tale, which pointed out the evil destiny of the singer, shame took possession of their hearts; and with eyes averted from *him* their rude mirth had so wantonly insulted, they sat for a moment embarrassed—but, seeing the mortified looks of Nero, (who little expected such a result) they laughed heartily at his disappointment, when he, little relishing their merriment, quitted the apartment,—leaving Britannicus master of the field, who received the warmest professions of attachment and condolence from all the guests, and, after thanking them for their good wishes, retired to the quietude of his chamber.

CHAPTER XIV.

"If heavens were just, men should have open breasts,
That we therein might read their guileful thoughts;
If heavens were just, that power that forceth love
Would never couple wolves and lambs together:
Yes; heavens are just—but thou art so corrupt,
That in thee all their influence doth change,
As in the spider good things turn to poison."

Soliman and Perseda.

AGRIPPINA, after the interview with her son, became gloomy and thoughtful—a wide difference had taken place between them in the space of a few days. The respect he used to pay her had dwindled into indifference, and so

speedily do the sycophantic race scent the downfall of power, that she saw a decided alteration in the looks of all around her. The serpent brood of courtiers now put forth their forked tongues, and reared their hooded crests, as she passed by them, who, but a few days before, crept into holes, if she but bent her brows. The time-serving senators withheld their attendance at her levee, and many of the noblest ladies of Rome refrained from visiting her, fearful of appearing the friends of one, whose power was on the wane; Acerronia was the sole consolation she possessed.—There is a sensation of mingled awe and pity, which creeps over the heart when we look on fallen majesty, which a conviction of its punishment being just cannot remove. When we gaze upon the ruins of some formerly beautiful edifice, we regret that so noble a structure should be liable to decay; but how much

deeper is our regret, when we behold the ruin of a gigantic mind—the prostration of that mighty intellect which governed nations! But the mind of the Ex-Empress possessed an elasticity which nothing could entirely subdue; it was too accustomed to tower, to remain long in subjection—like a tall poplar, whose pliant trunk, tortured by human art, may be compelled to bend its head until its topmost branches kiss the earth, but when the straining ligaments give way, with a bound that makes the peasant tremble, it regains its lofty state, shakes from its branches the degrading dust, and is itself again. She smothered the fiery indignation of her heart, but secretly conversed with those whom she knew would, at any time, join their interests to support Britannicus. She entirely gained their hearts by gifts and promises; and, in her moments of excitation, vowed that if her son should forget the love and duty he owed

her, to sow the seeds of civil war, and humble *him* as he would humble *her*. This, however, she hoped would never be required, although her intriguing spirit kept the slumbering fire ready at her touch to rise in flames, and startle the oppressor on his throne. She appeared outwardly to have transferred the affection she bore Nero to Britannicus; her kindness to Octavia increased as Nero's diminished, and she gained ground in the good opinion of the Claudian family, faster than she lost it in the heart of her son. At times she was affected, even to tears, at his unnatural behaviour, and asked pardon of Octavia, for the sin of forming so ill-sorted an alliance. The settled melancholy too of her favourite orphan afflicted her.

The increasing hatred of Nero for Britannicus was obvious to every one, and Agrippina trembled for the result—for in him she beheld the only means of regaining a portion of her

former power. This thought haunted her continually—it darkened upon her brow by day, and banished sleep from her pillow at night.

One memorable evening at the banquet table, the Imperial family observed an unusual irritation in the youthful Emperor, without being able to guess the cause. Octavia from time to time fixed her soft eyes upon his countenance, and, too well skilled in the expression of his face, her heart presaged some evil was at hand; but Britannicus paid little attention to his humour, and endeavoured to dispel the anxiety of his sister by every mark of brotherly attachment.

"A cup to Alecto!" exclaimed Nero, "and may her snakes strangle the enemies of Rome."

The toast was drank in silence, and Britannicus, more animated than usual, after desiring his cup-bearer to fill it to the brim, rose up, and, looking at his sister, said—"With your

permission, Emperor, I will toast a gentler dame. This cup is to 'Octavia, the chaste and good—long may she reign in every Roman heart, and ever prove, as now, her husband's honour and her nation's pride.'"

"You are very forward, Prince, in the school of compliment," cried the jealous Nero, "your tongue is well versed in flattery; but over waste of it may chance to bring poverty on the squanderer! I should advise you to husband it for a fitter subject; for instance, for such of your friends, whose apprehensions prevent them from declaring too hastily their devotion to you, and hatred of myself—it may do wonders with them, and their alacrity to serve you will then equal your most sanguine hopes."

"My friends!" replied Britannicus, "alas! how few I know who deserve that sacred title; yet those I deign to call so, never can be yours."

"And why not my important brother?"

" Because they are the enemies of vice."

The blood fled from the cheeks of Nero, and he trembled violently ; but forcing a contemptuous laugh, he drained a goblet to the *Fates*, and stretched himself upon his couch in apparent listlessness. Agrippina endeavoured to direct the conversation to the affairs of government, and addressing her son, enquired, who he intended to entrust with the new legions that were ready to proceed upon their march against the Parthians, and only waited for their General.

" Corbulo ;" then, turning to his attendants, he exclaimed, " bring hither a fan, and keep my temples cool—they burn and torture me.—So, stand between me and Britannicus."

" Are you unwell ?"

" Yes—no— no, I am better now."

" Corbulo is a man well fitted for the post—daring in war and wise in council. I rejoice to

hear you have made so good a choice. By whose advice did you appoint him?"

"By the advice of Burrhus; I would have given it to another, but he overruled me, and old Seneca——take hence thy fan, my blood has got a chill—Seneca seconded his advice, therefore I conclude I was wrong."

"Who is to be his colleague—or does he go alone?"

"Alone."

"In my opinion," continued Agrippina, "it would be well if C. Flaccus shared in the enterprise. His skill, united to Corbulo's, would make the prospect of success more certain."

"True, madam," said Britannicus, joining in the conversation (for anger was but a momentary passion with him) "Cornelius Flaccus has seen a great deal of service against these Parthians, their mode of warfare is well known

to him. Steno! bring me some of those British shell-fish, they are very fine; before I die, (the Fates permitting) I'll visit that fair island, for though her sons are barbarous enough, I hear from Ostorius its fertility and beauty is surprising. If my poor father was alive how much he would enjoy this dish. Stepmother, allow me to assist you to some of these heavy-armed inhabitants of the Britannic seas; the flavour is excellent. They tell me they were caught napping in their beds, near Rutufriæ, a celebrated spot, upon the coast, for fishermen.—Octavia, put aside that Phrygian bird, and try some of them upon my recommendation. The noble Nero has, no doubt, improved his voice by the speedy demolition of those *nightingales' tongues*—for my part, I am but a croaker, any one would think I fed upon *ravens*, my voice is so discordant."

"Dear Britannicus," said Octavia, "I am

rejoiced to see you in such spirits. Yesterday you appeared so sad that my heart bled to see you."

"Why yesterday, to be sure, and, indeed, I own, for some time past, my thoughts have kept me in a sorry humour. But I have had enough of care, and am resolved, so long as it is the pleasure of heaven to let me live, to live and laugh, let fortune frown or smile."

"You are *very* merry," observed Nero, drily.

"Aye, and will remain so for the short period I have to live."

The Emperor leaped from his couch, as if shot by an arrow, and fixed his eyes upon the youth, as if to look into his breast and read his heart. The rest of the company, startled by his manner, arose likewise; their movements caused his self-command to return to him, and he resumed his reclining position. Agrippina's curiosity was baffled—Octavia ventured to ask

if he were ill, but he answered in the negative, assuring the company that his conduct was the effect of his astonishment at the philosophy of his noble brother.

"He will be a wonderful man, if the gods spare him until his chin can boast of hair.—To what deity, Britannicus, will you consecrate the first growth of your beard?"

"Momus," he answered, "and the time is not far distant when I will fulfil my pledge; the down upon it is already long and unbecoming, I only want another summer to tinge it with a gentle shade of brown, and then off it comes.—Slave, bring me a portion of that mullet next to the statue of Epitrapazius."

"Will you try a piece of this pelican," asked Octavia.

"No, sister, I love it too well to feed upon it—for, of all that cleave the air, that bird most cherishes its helpless young;" a sigh fell

from his lips, and a shade of melancholy crossed his features as he spoke—but, endeavouring to regain his cheerfulness, he enquired of Agrippina, if the report of Vardanes having revolted from his father, was true?

"The best reports confirm it," she replied, "his eyes are fixed upon the Parthian crown, and his audacious hand will not shrink from rending it even from his father's brows."

"Stealing crowns appears to be the fashion of the age:—one with bold hand and ruthless heart snatches the bauble in the open day:—another, wrapt in darkness, steals, like a midnight thief, with soundless step, drops the fell poison in the sleeper's ear, and with the diadem adorns himself. But how does Volupses bear his son's defection and ingratitude?"

"With force opposed to force—the tempered steel of sovereignty against the iron weapons of rebellion."

"Oh, foul rebellion! May the all-seeing Jove protect the monarch's throne, and heap another Ætna on this new Typhon's breast!—Slave, fill another goblet, that I may drink 'success to the arms of the old king Volupses,' for though he is our enemy, the gods forbid his rebellious son should have the fortune to overpower his sire."

"I am glad to see you look so happy," interrupted Nero, "I begin to think you do mean to enjoy life while it lasts."

"No one drops into the grave without having tasted it, however slightly. The prince and peasant have an equal share; happiness may be classed in various degrees—the slave who labours through his cheerless task, stung by the whip of his unfeeling master, from sunrise until midnight, clasps it upon his bed of straw; for then he dreams he still is in his own loved land, seated with those who live within his breast!

and though he wakens to fresh toil and insult, the hope that the succeeding night will waft his spirit to those scenes from which he was enslaved, enables him to endure with fortitude the misery of the day; and even I partake its influence at times, but not so freely as that poor *slave*. And yet I am surrounded by my kindred—am placed so high upon the pinnacle of rank, that none should, and few *can* look over me—splendour surrounds me, and the choicest viands of every nation tempt my appetite, but they have lost their charms! Luxuries vitiate the palate, or cloy it—splendour, by constant show, dazzles but cannot please the eye—my rank brings countless dangers, and the slave's *slumber* I invoke in vain! May not *life* be a dream of the soul, and this world the region of its sleeping fancy—the cares and struggles that seem to environ it may be the

nightmares that annoy it, and death the waking start in which the illusion vanishes."

"It is a long dream," said Octavia, with a sigh.

"To some, dear sister, it is indeed a long one—a chequered one to all—and yet there are few who wish to have the slumber broken; few seek to break it themselves, although the power is in ourselves, to waken when we please."

"If," said Nero, "such impious dreams as these afflict you, may the Gods awaken you —lest in your sleep you should offend them, and pull down the wrath of heaven upon your head."

"I have no fear," replied Britannicus, "of vengeance from above, having done nothing to merit it below. My life has been one long scene of endurance, although my years are few; and the last act of vengeance man can inflict

upon me, is to rid me of an existence of which I am weary. I have a settled faith in the sweet doctrine of Numa. In that supreme power which governs all things, and which is, as he described it, 'impassable, invisible, incorruptible, and purely intelligible,' and feel no dread of future suffering, but a belief in some more happy state. My kindred's eyes are too often wet with tears, and it is only when I behold them dry, that I can taste of happiness. You smiled, Octavia, and my heart rejoiced."

"And now you are growing melancholy again. Brother! I forbid you to wear a look of gravity during supper, nay, for the whole night—such gloomy features are only fit for cypress groves, where friends lie sepulchred, and death presides."

"And who can say that his dark shadow is not, even now, about to spread itself between me and the things of this world? There is a

darkness I wish to pierce through, which hides futurity from our anxious eyes. I have endeavoured vainly to satisfy myself with the arguments of learned men, about the future state of that invisible and all-ruling portion of us which we call the soul. If there be truth in the doctrine of transmigration, I would pray for death to come and change its habitation—I would pray to be a bird, that I might spread my wings and fly far from the haunts of wickedness and man. But I promised to be gay—so, hence dull care, and welcome mirth! This negus is too hot—slave, bring some water to cool the draught."

"Britannicus!" said Agrippina, "you are unused to carousals—beware of drinking too much! You must not follow the example of Nero—he is a perfect reveller."

"You flatter me, madam! but there is little fear of his becoming my rival in any thing.—

Drink—drink! my noble brother! the beverage will make you sleep as soundly as the slave you were so envious of just now, and you may dream of flying from the haunts of wicked men for aught you know. Drink, Prince! I pledge you."

Octavia looked at Nero, and, startled at the expression on his face, dropped an amber goblet, studded with gems, upon the ground, as Britannicus was about to drink.

"Why, sister!" exclaimed the youth, placing his own upon the table untasted, "you have broken my favorite goblet—how pale you look."

"And who would not turn pale?" said Nero, quickly, "who had destroyed a goblet of such value. I think, madam, you might use vessels less expensive, if your delicate nerves are so easily agitated."

Octavia did not reply, but her whole frame shook with terror. The cheeks of Nero

were flushed with anger, but Britannicus ventured to become a mediator.

"Pray be not so angry, my lord," said he, "I will replace this drinking cup with another of equal value; though my whole year's allowance should go to pay for it:" and taking his chalice from the attendant, he drained it of its contents.

"The wine has a peculiar flavour," he observed.

"It is the best Falernian," replied Nero, who, turning his head away from Britannicus, stretched himself at full length upon the couch.

"I feel very cold!"

"Heavens! you are not well, my brother," cried Octavia, rising, alarmed at his colourless cheeks. "Send hither a physician."

"'Tis useless, dear Octavia," he replied, faintly, "the dream of life is over."

As he spoke he fell upon the floor, and the

next moment beheld him a breathless corpse.—A half-smothered scream escaped from Agrippina; but the mute agony of Octavia, as she stood gazing upon the inanimate body of her beloved brother, presented a picture harrowing to human nature.

"Take him into another room," said Nero, with the utmost indifference, "it is only an epileptic fit, to which he is very subject."

A silence, befitting the chamber of death, was observed by all. The body was removed;—Agrippina supported the fainting form of Octavia out of the apartment, and one by one the guests departed from the banquet, until the *murderer* was left *alone!*

CHAPTER XV.

" Where shall I run, to breathe abroad my woes—
My woes, whose weight hath wearied the earth ?
The blust'ring winds, conspiring with my words
At my lament, have mov'd the leafless trees,
Disrob'd the meadows of their flowery green,
Made mountains marsh, with spring tides of my tears,
And broken through the brazen gates of hell.
Yet still tormented is my tortur'd soul,
With broken sighs and restless passions,
That, winged, mount; and, hovering in the air,
Beat at the windows of the brightest heavens,
Soliciting for justice and revenge !"

Spanish Tragedy.

THE night was stormy, and the rain descended in torrents, when a party of soldiers were watched, as they quitted the court-yard of the palace with a heavy burthen, by three

figures muffled in their ample cloaks, as if to avoid discovery, who issued from a door that led to a private entrance of the royal apartments. The step of the first was unsteady, and the deep and audible sobs which, in hysterical succession, broke from her lips, bespoke a heart overcharged with pain and misery. Her companion was eagerly persuading her to abandon her intention of issuing forth in such a dreadful night, but in vain.

"Talk not to me of the fury of the elements," said the ill-fated Octavia, "no storm can equal that which rages in my breast; and the cold rain will, perhaps, allay the heat, that like a hoop of glowing iron seems to sear my brow and eat into my brain.—Follow or leave me, as your feelings dictate— I will behold him once again."

"Let me implore you not to expose yourself to the sneers of the rude soldiery: remember

they are the instruments of one we must not name: they are paid for crime, and subject to no check but from the hands of their employer. My power is on the wane," and, as Agrippina confessed the unwelcome truth, her voice faltered—but she recovered herself, and proceeded in a calm and melancholy tone—"You, my daughter, have never tasted of its baneful sweets, and therefore are the happier. I revelled in them for awhile, and now I see them only one by one vanishing as I lift them to my lip, and in their stead the bitter food of servitude is placed before me. Where smiles and deepest adulation met my eye, the cold looks of indifference appear; and those who, in my zenith, worshipped me, now barely condescend to bow to me.—How the rain gushes from the black vault above us—return! return!"

The voice of admonition was not heard by the unhappy lady; the grief she had so long

suppressed through fear of her Imperial consort, now broke forth with uncontroulable vehemence. Finding her efforts useless to change the determination of the Empress, Agrippina closed the conversation, and, drawing her cloak more closely round her figure, gave her arm to support the weak frame of her illustrious but ill-fated companion; and, followed by the attendant, they passed the outer porch, guided by the torches of the soldiery that shone dimly in the distance. Mutual horror at the perpetration of so foul a deed had drawn them together, after quitting the supper room, and terror sealed their lips while in the presence of the murderer and his instruments. They knew a word—a tear—dropped for the fate of Britannicus, would hasten their own destruction!—They were fearful of even mentioning the cruel deed to any of their own attendants, surrounded as they were upon every side by the spies of

the Emperor. In the murder of Britannicus, Agrippina saw the probability of her own. He had long since thrown away his reverence for paternal authority; a studied coldness appeared in him whenever she approached, and he had withdrawn the guards that used to perform duty at her palace, thus depriving her of all regal pomp and splendour. Her enemies were busily endeavouring to sink her, and accusations were hourly made, to carry their wishes into effect. Thus circumstanced, she adhered more closely to the interests of Octavia, of whose attachment she was fond, and for whom she imbibed a strong partiality ever since the death of Silanus. Mutual grief begat mutual confidence, and Octavia, who was hitherto alarmed at her intriguing character, and doubted her sincerity, now poured the secret anguish of her heart into her ear, without reserve.

Her freedman, Antonius, having overheard the order given for the Prince's immediate interment, informed her of it, and she, resolving to witness the ceremony, made a disclosure of her intentions to Agrippina, who, having endeavoured without effect to dissuade her from such a resolution, offered to become her companion. They reached the field of Mars, and, by the aid of the torches of the burial party, perceived the tribune, Julius Pollio—a man of infamous character, who was universally detested for his disgusting subserviency to those in power, and domineering conduct over those whose rank was inferior to his own. Subtle and ferocious, a sycophant and an oppressor,—he became the terror of the weak and rival of the strong—the associate of infamy, and the instrument of vice.

The Empress uttered an ejaculation of fear, as her eye fell upon his remorseless features, and a cold tremor ran through her frame, like

the last summons of despotic death. Her cry reached the ears of the tribune and his companions, who moved in different directions to ascertain from whence it proceeded; and in doing so discovered to the unhappy lady, a soldier in the act of hollowing a grave, who paid no attention to the surprise of his comrades, but proceeded with his work with brute-like insensibility—the stroke of the spade as it penetrated the saturated earth, went like a dagger to the heart of Octavia!

Agrippina stood beside her, underneath the broken portico of an ancient mausoleum, watching with intense anxiety, when suddenly a man, hitherto concealed from their observation, with his head bare and his grey locks streaming with the rain, which still continued to fall in torrents, stood palpable before them, giving directions to the party. With a piercing cry, that filled all who heard it with dismay,

she rushed into the centre of the group, and threw herself upon the dead body of her brother! She wrung her hands in agony—heaped the damp earth upon her head—then, starting to her feet, gazed for a moment upon the guilty face of the hoary hypocrite! His eyes fell upon the earth, and she exclaimed, in a voice broken with contending passions—

"Art thou here, Sosibius? And was the closing of this fatal tragedy committed to your guidance? Bad man! false friend! Oh cruel, cruel tutor! Yes; it is too plain. Who so fit to conduct a midnight scene like this, as he who would himself have perpetrated the horrid crime, had not the gods looked down with pity, and averted for a time the dreadful fate? But when they slept, another wretch was found to execute the deed! Look on this face, blackening beneath the rain of Heaven, as it beats off the crime-concealing paint, with which

lovely features were suffused, to screen the murderous deed! How often have you danced him on your knees, when the bright glow of health crimsoned that cheek! Look on these arms, which round your neck in playful love a thousand times have twined—these lips, that lisped your name in infancy! Oh, wicked man! who, with thy murderous band, in such a night defying the great vengeance of the God, whose lightning flashes fiercely over thee. Tremble! The hand that grasps the thunderbolt is raised! My brother! my Britannicus! here let me die beside thee!"

She then flung herself upon the senseless corpse, and wept bitterly. The tribune, unmoved by her anguish, directed his soldiers to lift her up, and cover the dead body; but before they had time to execute his orders, a meteoric bolt fell into the centre of the terrified group, shedding, in its descent, a light vivid

enough to dazzle the beholders! The rocky substance upon which it fell was shivered, and scattered to a considerable distance; some of the fragments filled the grave intended for Britannicus, while others wounded several of the nocturnal party, who immediately dispersed, terrified at the prodigy! Sosibius alone remained—a living statue, mute and motionless, with his eyes protruding from their sockets, fixed upon Octavia, his teeth clenched, and horror stricken at the thought of his own danger! The appearance of Agrippina caused a convulsive motion within him, and restored the power of speech. He threw himself at her feet, and in an agony of terror invoked her mercy. But, with a glance that turned his heart to ice, she said "I withhold it—hope not —you know me!" With a cry of despair he rushed from the spot; and Agrippina, raising Octavia, conducted her to the ruined sepulchre,

desiring Antoninus to bring the body after them.

"Be firm, my sweet Octavia," she said, as she led her gently forward, "your freed man has prepared an agreeable surprise for you.—We cannot call the dead to life again; and must, therefore, content ourselves with paying such respect to his ashes, as the tyranny of our ruler cannot deprive them of. They passed over some ruined fragments, and halted in the centre of the building; and Antoninus arriving at the same moment, removed a large flag-stone which concealed a narrow staircase, leading to a vault beneath, from which a glare of light shot upward, as he descended with the body. According to his directions, they followed him to the vault, in the centre of which stood an altar, composed of some of the fragments with which the ground was covered, and heaped with piles of fragrant wood, with a pro-

fusion of incense. Antoninus placed the body of the Prince upon this funeral pyre, and Octavia and Agrippina, after throwing their black veils upon the heap, knelt silently beside it, while he placed a torch to the combustible materials; they instantly ignited—the flames rose to the roof,—the thick clouds of fragrant smoke rolled upwards through the aperture by which they entered, and the impenetrable darkness of the night screened it from the eyes of the inhabitants of the city, as it ascended to the gates of Heaven.

CHAPTER XVI.

——— " In prosperous fortune
A shadow, passing light, throws to the ground
Joy's baseless fabric ; in adversity
Comes malice, with a sponge moistened in gall,
And wipes each beauteous character away."

Agamemnon.

To quell the popular feeling of disgust, occasioned by the late murder of Britannicus, a proclamation was sent forth by Nero, to justify the neglect of funeral honours, by an appeal to the form of ancient customs, which refused an exposure of the young and virtuous after death—to prevent the sorrow into which the

nation might be plunged, at beholding the inanimate forms of those, whose public or private virtues were so much admired while living.

The great were bought over with flattery and gold—who quieted their consciences with observing, that they dare not refuse such proofs of the Emperor's favour, lest the same punishment should light upon themselves that overwhelmed Britannicus.—Agrippina continued firm in her resentment; her indignation was unquenchable; and the hatred of Nero towards her, became stronger every day. By his commands, the sentinels were removed from the gates of her palace, and the body of German guards, he formerly presented her with as a mark of honour, were withdrawn. Trouble seldom comes unattended—a long and fearful train of ills follow her steps, at which the spirit bends and the heart bleeds!—The palace of Antonia, the mother of Germanicus, to which

she had for some time been removed, now became the resort of the curious and disaffected; and various reports were carried to Nero, all calculated to excite his fear and hatred to the utmost pitch. Among those who were most eager for her downfall, was the licentious and disappointed Julia Silana, whose marriage with Sextus Africanus was prevented by the intrigues of Agrippina. With consummate hypocrisy she courted the favour of her enemy, for the purpose of obtaining a confidence which would enable her to accomplish her ruin more easily. She fanned her indignation against her son into a blaze, by recapitulating the indignities he had heaped upon her; protested that her expulsion from the palace of the Cæsars was a crime, with which gods and men were equally disgusted; and thus, with protestations of devoted attachment, she sometimes drew forth words, which, through the instrumentality of Paris, (an

actor, and a favourite with Nero) were with exaggeration transmitted to his ear. Information was at length given him, proceeding from the same quarter, that a conspiracy was on foot to overturn the empire, of which his mother was the fountain head; and that she had entered into a criminal league with Rubellius Plautus to assassinate him, and then seat themselves upon the Imperial throne! Circumstances occurred to give the accusation a fair colour. Rubellius at this time had become the constant companion of the intriguing mother, who knew his aim, and kept his hopes alive, as well as those of his powerful partizans—more for the sake of gratifying her love of power, and to show what her interest could yet command, should her son's behaviour force her to seek the assistance of friends,—than any real wish to injure him who still possessed the

warmest chamber in her heart, in spite of his unfilial bearing.

The Emperor, having summoned Seneca to his closet, complained bitterly of the ambition of Agrippina, the treason of Burrhus, and the presumptuous hopes of Plautus. In the first ebullition of his passion, he gave orders for a tribune to hasten to the palace of his mother, and to take her life at once; he commanded Burrhus' immediate removal from the prætorian guards; and the arrest of Plautus, and his associates—wavered—then countermanded all he had said; and finally applied to Seneca for his advice.—Seneca enquired what grounds he had for believing such a plot existed?

"What grounds, my smooth philosopher? Have I not given sufficient cause to rouse the tigress? By your wisdom led, have I not deprived her of all influence in the government,

of which she was in fact the supreme head?—Have I not stripped her of her regal wardrobe?—an act in itself enough to sting a woman to the quick. Have I not taken from her pomp and state? Is she not a private woman again, with nothing but her wealth to comfort her?—and will that satisfy a mind like her's? Pretty good grounds, I think, my sage adviser!"

"But who is your informer, and from what source does he derive his knowledge?"

"Paris brought the intelligence, and Junia Silana is the informer."

"It would not be advisable to depend much upon *their* reports—both speak perhaps from other motives than for your safety, or the welfare of the government. You are not aware that Burrhus lately, disgusted with her licentious character, reproved her harshly in the presence of Sextus Africanus, who was upon

the eve of marrying her. This reproof, following shortly after some insinuations from your noble mother, caused him to give up his intention.—With regard to the advice I gave respecting the latter when called upon, and not till then, by you to do so,—I entreat of you to think I was not led away by any private feeling of resentment towards her, but a solicitude for your honour and the public good."

"Why, I must needs acquit thee of having any private ill-will towards my mother, knowing, as I do, that she it was who made thee what thou art, protected thee, and gave thee shelter from the storms of adversity; and truly, thou hast made her a scurvy recompence!—However, as thou sayest it was for my honour and the public good, I will believe thee, though thou art but an ingrate after all, sage Seneca! Give me my lute, that I may amuse myself while you offer your advice. A plague on

these south winds—it is out of tune. Take heed that your counsel is not ill-timed!"

Seneca undertook the cause of Burrhus with much warmth, described his zeal and attachment to the government as incorruptible; and, after expatiating for some time upon the merits of his friend, bethought himself that it was necessary to make some observations respecting the principal person accused, to whom, as the Emperor reminded him, he was indebted for his exaltation to the station he then held.

"Towards your august parent rest assured I feel the warmest gratitude, for the many favors she has lavished upon me with an unsparing hand, and if, at any time, in the performance of my duty to you and to the state, my advice may seem to bear too hardly upon her, no one can lament the necessity which compels me to offer such more deeply than myself. Although I would not persuade you to believe implicitly

any information proceeding from Junia Silana, it would be the height of folly to let it pass unnoticed. You have not to learn that Agrippina's nature is otherwise than calculated to forget a real or a fancied injury. Too many instances have been seen of her activity in the pursuit of vengeance; I need not enumerate them. Her love of power is inordinate, as you have often witnessed, and never did it show itself more glaringly than when the Armenian ambassadors were admitted to your presence. But for my timely counsel the honor of the state would have been forfeited to her temerity, when, in the face of all the senators, she advanced to share your seat and your authority! Terror and amazement was visible in every countenance until I turned her folly to your glory; I bade you rise to receive and welcome her, and the ambassadors, deluded by the artifice, ascribed to your filial piety the circumstance which

was occasioned by her thirst for power. Deprived of that jewel of her heart, it should not excite our wonder if she attempts to regain it, at any sacrifice. But Rubellius is not rash enough to undertake a project so wild, so chimerical. I am aware of his being frequently seen with many of his friends at her palace—the disaffected find a ready welcome within her gates; but, pardon me, if I strongly doubt that she would league with any for your downfall. What I advise is, that an immediate examination should take place; let her be summoned to appear, and answer any charge that can be brought against her, relative to this conspiracy. Let Burrhus conduct it, and, after a fair hearing, judge between them."

"I will grant this; but with this understanding—if he believe her guilty, she must die! and let her execution be accomplished before I know of her condemnation."

CHAPTER XVII.

" How long d 'ye mean to hide the Emp'ror from me ?
Must I ne'er see him more but as a meddler,
A busy, gossipping impertinent ?
Have I then raised your fortune to this height,
To put a barrier 'twixt my son and me ?"

Racine.

A MESSENGER was then despatched to Agrippina, commanding her to appear before Burrhus, to answer to a charge of treason. A blush of indignation lighted up her countenance when she heard the nature of the crime of which she was accused, and called upon so unceremoniously to defend. It was, however, succeeded

by a smile of disdain, as she inclined her head towards the tribune, expressive of her intention to obey the mandate. When he was gone, Acerronia, who had listened with a trembling heart to his address, threw herself at the feet of her mistress, and implored her not to allow of Burrhus for her judge.

"He loves you not," she exclaimed, "he has ever been your foe; and now an opportunity occurs to vent the rancour of his heart, he will not check the impulse—be sure of it. This is some piece of treachery, concocted with care, by those your glory dazzles. For my sake and your own, dear mistress, kind protectress, let them not have the savage joy of sacrificing you to the unnatural vengeance of one, I dare not name—listen to my supplication—rush not, I implore you, headlong into ruin."

Agrippina raised her to her arms, and en-

deavoured to assure her that her fears were groundless; then, seating herself, she was for some minutes lost in thought. Acerronia watched her expressive countenance, as conjecture followed conjecture, and the shadows of disappointment succeeded their momentary brightness,—like April clouds that sweep over the green hills, leaving them bright and dark alternately. At length she rose up, and, with a triumphant smile, exclaimed "'Tis she—I know my enemy; and before night she shall feel my power—weak insect!"

"Order my litter!" she continued, in a tone of authority, "I am impatient to behold this shallow fool rush headlong into ruin!" then, turning to Acerronia, she again bade her to be under no apprehensions for her safety, "for the accusers," said she, "will become the victims of their own perfidy."

The apartment in which Agrippina was received by Burrhus and Seneca, was thronged with the Emperor's freed men and satellites.—The proud matron answered their prying glances with a stern look of reproof, which gave warning of the tempest gathering within her,—the very anticipation of which made her enemies tremble, not knowing upon whom its fury might alight. She walked with a firm foot, and elevated head, to the seat reserved for her; and, with the gloomy dignity of offended majesty, demanded that her accusers should stand forward.

"Let me behold," said she, "the daring fools, who think with calumny to work my downfall! Where are these wretches, who, in conspiring against the mother of Cæsar, cannot see their own ruin?"

"Let me entreat you, madam," said Seneca, "to be calm, and rely upon our justice in this

examination. If you have been wrongfully accused, the conspirators, however lofty their station, will find, that to accuse you wrongfully is a crime which merits, and shall receive the severest punishment."

"I likewise," said Burrhus, "assure you, madam, that the most impartial justice shall be administered; and promise you sufficient satisfaction, if it appear this charge is brought through the envy or malice of any individual, let his rank be what it may.

"Burrhus!" she replied, "I know you for my enemy; but I acquit you of having any participation in the present nefarious attempt to accelerate my ruin. I believe you to be *generally* just; but I likewise believe, that you are swayed by private feelings of resentment towards me, which will be gratified if circumstances afford you an opportunity of finding me guilty. I shall, therefore, have in you a severe

scrutinizer, and a fatal sentencer, provided the evidence my enemies can command overbears the true and simple statement I shall make.—This is as I would have it. I require no favour from your hands, if my guilt be made manifest, and demand that none shall be shown to the causers of this shameful investigation, if I can prove it to be set on foot by an implacable and wily enemy."

There was a buzz throughout the apartment as she spoke, doubt and anxiety were visible in the faces of the curious, and dejection overspread the features of those who were desirous of witnessing her ruin. Seneca was about to address her a second time, when, with a smile of bitter scorn, the indignant matron exclaimed—"This is excellent! the men who owe their all of greatness to my bounty, who but for me would have been left to die in insignificance and exile, are now the chosen and the willing parties to

sit in judgment upon their patroness, and probably are called upon to be her murderers. You Burrhus, but for my influence, might have remained in the unenvied station, from which I raised you to the high post you now possess.—Had Lucius Geta and Rufius Crispinus (whose joint command you now *alone* possess) been seated on that bench to work my ruin, I should not have been surprised, for they have lost by me; but I could scarcely anticipate to find in you, a fire to scorch the hand which kindled it. You, Seneca! but for me, had never sat so proudly there, but might have pined in Corsica —an outcast. How well that seat becomes you. Oh, for shame!—has gratitude for ever left the earth? Nay, decency itself is lost; or you could never sit so calmly there, while *I* am present! Up, sirs, on your feet, and learn the respect due to the descendant of Augustus, and the mother of Nero!"

The tone of command in which this was delivered, had the desired effect, and they rose up together, at her bidding. Calmed by this involuntary motion of respect, she desired them to proceed with their questions.

Burrhus then informed her, that the fears of the Emperor had been awakened by the report of a conspiracy, formed by Rubellius Plautus and herself. The informers were Iturius, Calvisius, and Antimetus; and their testimonies had been supported by the confessions of Silana and Domitia, whose affection for the Emperor had ever been proverbial, and whose watchful care during his youth merited the warmest praises of the nation. "It is said that your palace is the scene of midnight meetings, where all the leaders of this faction assemble, and deliberate upon the means of overturning the state; that you have endeavoured to seduce the provinces from their allegiance; and to corrupt

the city guards—nay, that you have even poisoned the minds of all the slaves and freed men belonging to the Emperor.—This is an awful charge—a crime of so deep and so unnatural a dye, that, should it be proved, I tremble at the sentence the responsibility of my office will compel me to pronounce."

"No doubt, you feel most forcibly the awful duty you have so readily accepted. Now then, hear me! You have cited me to appear before you, to answer to a charge at once the most audacious, ignorant, and unfounded! and you have lent your wisdoms to deliberate upon a cause that a child could at once decide upon, who knew the difference between right and wrong. Your informers, you say, are no less personages than the bankrupt Iturius, and the worthless Calvisius—men shunned by the noble and the good, corrupt in their morals, and infamous for their vices; creatures, whose words,

oaths, or souls, are to be bought or hired; luxurious in their habits, they sell their minds to sin, to satisfy the cravings of the body; things that are kept, at bad men's cost, to work their evil plottings; that cringe, and lie, and sift for information, that may tend to ruin the informer. But seldom passes by a trial, upon which these hirelings are not called forth to support the cause of iniquity; and they are now supported by a decayed beauty, of licentious manners, whose lasting enmity I have drawn upon myself, because I would not see a noble youth entrapped by the artifices of an acknowledged wanton. Since I have resided in the palace Antonia, to which place it pleased my son to remove me (by the advice, no doubt, of his wise counsellors) this woman has been the most importunate of all my visitors, the most profuse in her professions of eternal devotion and regard; and, in the cunning of her heart, be-

lieved my vision blinded so effectually, that she could achieve my ruin, without awakening me to a sense of her perfidy! That she, who never bore a child, cannot conceive the sacred love a parent feels for her offspring, is not strange; but I have felt how blissful it is to rear the babe I brought into the world—have watched it, as it grew, like a sweet plant my care had brought to perfection. The adulteress may change her paramour, but a mother cannot renounce her child.—Next comes Antimetus, the freed man of Domitia, her paramour—a fitting person to be listened to—a man, whose looks, words, and actions, are all subservient to his mistress' commands. You have been pleased to laud the tenderness, with which she treated her young nephew! When my care for his advancement brought with it sleepless nights and restless days—when every faculty of my soul was stretched, to persuade Claudius to

adopt him, until I sank beneath my unceasing toil,—where then was this Domitia? Wooing the deities of woods and streams, and, careless of his welfare, yielding up herself to all the luxuries of rural life; her baths, her ponds, her lakes, at Baiæ, engrossed her whole attention. When, with a mother's eagerness to exalt her offspring, I laboured for his consulship, she lived a life of luxury and ease, unmindful of his future greatness, or, at least, determined that it should be the work of other hands than hers; and when, at length, I seated him upon the throne, left vacant by the death of Claudius, then—and then only, did she come to Rome to pay court to her Imperial nephew, and strive to turn his heart against the mother, whose fondness for him made her burst the bounds of prudence, virtue, fear! Oh, that Domitia would vie with me in fondness for my son! I would forgive her all the wrong she has

done me, and love her with a sister's pure affection. Let her even now exert her influence over his mind, and wean him from those habits which disgrace his station; but hers is not a mind to conquer obstacles. She waits until some good and persevering spirit has achieved the work she ought to have accomplished, and will then stand forth to effect its ruin, as she does mine! You accuse me of tampering with the city guards! Let me behold the man, if such there be, who ventures to substantiate this charge."

She paused for a moment, expecting a reply; but fear had so completely taken possession of the agents engaged to effect her ruin, that no one ventured to speak. She then proceeded,— "No answer! no accuser! Let me then ask, what province has withdrawn its allegiance at my instigation? Still no reply! Then, to expose the fallacy of this charge, and show the

shallowness of those who ventured to commence this prosecution, which shall recoil upon themselves. What should I gain by this alledged conspiracy? Presuming Rubellius Plautus, or any rash adventurer should seize the reins of government, dethrone my son, banish, or, by more cruel means, remove him—what might I then expect—would he put trust in her who, in defiance of justice, nature and humanity, dethroned a son to place a traitor there?—Would he not shudder to embrace the wretch who sacrificed her offspring at the shrine of her ambition?—Could he enjoy the splendour of a throne with such a serpent ever at his side?—Would he not free himself from its detested coil, and crush the object of his fear and loathing? He would. I am not so rash a gamester as to stake my life to compass my revenge, even if such a feeling could exist in me against *mine own*. Oh! how the wolves would rush from

their dark haunts, and, open mouthed, pursue me, in hopes to glut their vengeance on my head; and may be with justice, for I have been a scourge to many, but never in remotest thought did injury to my son. Silent all!—I thought that I was summoned here to meet a host of enemies! are they all tongue-tied? I demand admittance to the Emperor—a mother wishes to embrace her child!"

For a few moments there was a solemn silence; at length, Seneca gave a sign for the doors to be opened, and a murmur of approbation expressed the general gratification of the spectators. Some there were, indeed, whose features revealed the disappointment they felt, and upon such the eye of Agrippina fell by turns, while a momentary smile passed over her countenance, unobserved by all, except those whom she had already marked out for punishment. She then

passed through the doorway to the inner chamber, and the wondering circle were left to conjecture what would be the result of the interview.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Let me have leave to see you at all hours,
Nor Burrhus dare to stop me at your door."

"Well, madam, henceforth I'm resolved, my gratitude
Shall in all hearts ingrave your power deep,
And I already bless that happy coldness,
Which now revives the ardour of your friendship."

Britannicus.

Nero, who had been anxiously awaiting the result of the examination, started with surprise on seeing his mother enter the room, and uncertain whether she had been found innocent or guilty, hesitated to address her. There was an expression of sorrow in her countenance un-

mingled with reproach, and she addressed him in a calm voice.

"I come to give you pleasure, my son; to relieve you from an anxiety which must have been, I conjecture, almost insupportable. I can well imagine the struggle you have endured within the last few hours. A son, who is called upon to bear a part in the condemnation or acquittal of a mother, and is uncertain which course justice will compel him to adopt, must endure much before the moment arrives for deciding upon it. It gives me joy to relieve your heart from this unwelcome burthen. I have faced my enemies and baffled their malignant hopes; I had to answer silence, for no one ventured to accuse me. There was not one of them but bent his eyes to earth at my approach, and, filled with conscious guilt, their tongues refused their office. Even Burrhus, and the smooth-tongued Seneca sat confounded,

and in spite of hatred could not refuse me admittance to you; nay, blushed to be the judges of so barefaced and unfounded an accusation. We have not met, my son, in private for some time—we have been separated by false friends and implacable enemies. Then let me hope you feel as I do in this interview, and that you will make this day of my acquittal, a day, likewise, of our firm reconciliation."

Nero, during the address of Agrippina, recovered from the surprise he was thrown into by her unexpected appearance, and, when she ceased speaking, rushed into her arms.

"I call the gods to witness," said he, "how much your words have relieved my mind. I shall never forgive myself for having been led away by foul reports to think you capable of treason, or of any feeling injurious to my welfare. Thou best of mothers, still let me call thee so; forgive me for my past neglect, when

I confess the breath of slander blackened you too successfully, and made me fancy you an enemy when I ought not to have listened to it. Say what I shall do to gain your pardon? for it is my place to sue."

"Punish our mutual enemies."

"I give them up to your just indignation, do with them as you please; your will in this shall be free as air—pronounce their fate and fear no obstacle to hinder it. Is there aught else you can require, and I can grant you?"

"Nothing but your filial love, my son. Oh, Nero, steel your heart against those who seek to harden it against me. Did you but know the bitter hours that I have passed since I was driven from these walls, the pangs your unkindness has inflicted on me, the disgraceful slights I have endured from your neglectful conduct, you would pity me."

"What shall I do to prove my penitence?"

"Punish my wrongers."

"I have already promised your just resentment shall be gratified, and I will study to be all you wish in future. Your foes, from this moment, shall be mine; and for the present, that I may seem to act in this without your influence, hasten to your villa at Antium, there I will join you in a few days, or you shall visit me at Baiæ, and in that blissful spot we will banish all worldly cares."

"Oh, Nero!" exclaimed the noble matron, bursting into tears of tenderness, "this kindness from a child so long estranged, falls upon my heart like dew upon an almost blighted heath. Let me press you once more in my arms, my dear son, my all of happiness! Thy mother blesses thee, and may the gods make thee their choicest care."

"Nay, weep not, madam; tears should only dim the eyes of those whose hearts are sick with grief—we must be gay."

"There is a rainbow shining through my tears, which tells of hope and future sunshine, Nero. But Seneca and Burrhus are without, they wait your orders; my accusers too, may, by this time, have found their speech, which conscious guilt suppressed when I was near them."

"No word shall henceforward have the power to injure you in my regard," he replied, embracing her tenderly, and striking his hand upon a metallic table, which produced a sound that echoed through the palace, and instantly brought a numerous train of attendants. "Go," said he, "and inform the noble Burrhus, and likewise Seneca, that it is my pleasure to have Iturius and Calvisius put under immediate arrest."

"But Junia Silana," exclaimed Agrippina, hastily interrupting him.

"Oh! fear not, madam; do not imagine we will let the head of the conspiracy escape. I pledge myself to punish her in a manner yourself shall deem most satisfactory. And now, most noble mother, leave me to myself. If my advice be deemed worthy of your attention, I should persuade you to set out for Antium to-night. I shall be at Baiæ in a few days, to celebrate the festival of Minerva, and will apprise you of the time to visit me, when I will come in person to receive you on the coast, and bring you intelligence how your enemies are disposed of."

"I will follow your advice, my son, and set out to-night for Antium."

"Do so, dear mother! farewell, farewell!—and all night's evils follow you!" he muttered when she had quitted the room. "Infernal

Pluto! hast thou no demon in thy realms of fire to send me but this plague? Ho! Seneca, Burrhus." They entered as he called for them. "Oh, ye are come! How happens it you permitted my mother to enter this apartment?—Reply not, I am in no humour for long speeches—I have promised to sacrifice Silana and her accomplices to her anger. They could not prove what they advanced, she tells me—the worse for them—they should have planned it better—they deserve their fate for their stupidity; banishment and confiscation is their doom; so let the senate know. See that the decree is carried into immediate effect—away. Bibulus! bring me a bowl of wine."

CHAPTER XIX.

"The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone, as some volcanic isle;
No touch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile!
The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain."

Byron.

All was performed according to the Emperor's commands. The enemies of Agrippina were banished from Rome, and their estates confiscated. But although she escaped the plot of Silana and her accomplices, there started up another and more formidable foe—this was no

other than the lovely and libidinous Poppæa—the faithless wife of Rufus Crispinus, a Roman knight, and as faithless consort of Otho—who had inflamed the heart of Nero with a violent passion, which increased daily. She aimed at becoming his Empress, and considered the removal of Agrippina as the first step to her anticipated greatness. To accomplish this, she made use of every effort; and, as it was the wish of all people to see the pride of Agrippina humbled, she met with no opposition to the calumnies she industriously circulated in different channels, that were sure to reach her lover's ears.

Agrippina reached Antium, where she awaited news from her son, who, no less punctual, departed soon after her for Campania, to celebrate the festival of Minerva at Baiæ, from which place he dispatched a letter to his mother, requesting her to partake of the festivities, and

hasten her departure from Antium. She accordingly embarked, and after a delightful voyage, was welcomed on her landing by the Emperor, who embraced her with the apparent warmth of a most dutiful and affectionate son. He conducted her to one of his villas upon the coast, named Bauli—a beautiful spot, situated between Misenum and the Gulf of Baiæ; and, after mutual promises of everlasting love and regard, he left her, having received her promise to attend the festival upon the following day at Baiæ. As he mounted his steed to depart, "Look!" he cried, pointing to a galley, which in magnificence far exceeded any then anchored in the bay, "I have provided a vessel worthy to bear the mother of Nero. I know your passion for the sea; and had it equipped for your reception."

The villa, situated upon an eminence, commanded a view of the opposite shores—the an-

cient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and, towering over the latter, the majestic form of Vesuvius; turning seaward, the bold promontory of Surrentum met the eye, and, beyond it, the lovely island of Capræ, like a bright emerald in the blue ocean.

Acerronia, who accompanied Agrippina to Antium, and from thence to Bauli, wandered that evening in the gardens of the villa, by the ocean's margin, which were shaded by acacias and broad spreading sycamores,—lilacs and bright labernums dipped their flowers in the salt waves, and tall palms and cedars formed delightful shades, beneath which she sat, like a pale spirit of some other world, condemned to pine on earth, far from her native home and happy friends. Her eyes were fixed upon the noble city of Pompeii; it looked like a residence of the gods,—so brightly shone its marble palaces and golden temples in the beams of the

setting sun,—too lovely to be destroyed. A light foot-step roused her from her reverie, and, turning her head, she beheld, to her utter astonishment, the unfortunate Camillus—so pale, and so emaciated, that she shuddered at the sight of him.

"In the name of Heaven, what has brought thee here, Camillus?" she exclaimed.

"The hope," he answered in a dejected tone, "of once more beholding you—to entreat that you will once more permit me to remain near your person. I have but a short time to live, and I appeal to your humanity for permission to resume my former situation, if the Empress will again accept my services."

"How knew you we were here?"

"Ah! lady, love is lynx-eyed; the poets call him blind—his ears are ever open, and whispers float into them from afar off. On recovering from the wound my frenzy made me inflict

upon myself in your presence, I obeyed your orders, and left Rome—with a heavy heart I quitted it—and repaired to Antium, where I arrived the same day; and from thence endeavoured to gain intelligence of every thing that transpired in the palace, of which you were an inmate. On our lady's arrival at Antium, it was my intention to have flung myself at her feet, and implored her to take me again under her protection; but my heart failed me. I endeavoured to interrupt you in the gardens, but was continually disappointed. At length, I heard of your intended departure for Campania: I hastened by land to Baiæ. Blame me not, lady! How could I shun the spot, upon which the moon of my happiness was to shine? I wished to breathe my last in its mild light: then, say, you will not banish me a second time! I will be silent as those within the grave, until

you bid me speak; and, even then, will never breathe the anguish of my heart."

"I am sorry, Camillus, for both our sakes, and most for yours, that you had not sufficient resolution to avoid this interview; but I have been long inured to misery, and the additional pang of seeing a fellow creature miserable, I would but cannot render happy, must be endured without a murmur. Come, we will leave this spot, and seek our mistress. You look as if you would linger—have you aught to say?"

"You question, and I will answer—yes."

"Speak, then."

"The last hour of delight I enjoyed, was at a time like this; I am strangely altered since that happy evening."

"You are, indeed!"

"Not more in my outward appearance than

in my disposition; I was a thing so full of vanity, that I made enemies as the night-dew brings forth mushrooms, by thousands in an hour; and I am now so desolate, that even they would pity me, could they but read my heart."

"Agrippina," said Acerronia, wishing to change the conversation, "is invited to sup with the Emperor to-morrow; he has fitted out a galley for her use, and she will embark in the morning to wait upon him."

"Not if my prayers can change her resolution. The sunny day brings forth the adder—and I have reason to believe, Cæsar's apparent fondness is but a lure to compass her destruction!"

"Be careful, Camillus, of what you utter! Know you the danger that would attend our being overheard?"

"I do; but we are private here. She must not trust her person in that galley. I over-

heard a conversation which convinces me there is a plot to murder her, conducted by her unnatural son!"

"Merciful gods!" exclaimed the girl, "reveal to me this moment all you know!"

"It is scarcely an hour since, as I was seated upon the beach, thinking of one, too dear, and tracing unmeaning characters in the sand,—I heard the voices of two men disputing. They approached within a few paces of where I sat, screened by a fishing-boat, when one of them asked his comrade—'Do you know what will follow, if you persist in disclosing this plot to his mother?' 'Yes;' replied the other, 'she will be preserved, and the Emperor will have one crime less upon his conscience.' 'May be so; but you will not live to witness the good effects of your disclosure. You will stand a fair chance of being crucified for your officious zeal —the bow-string is the mildest punishment

you can expect; and, unless you are an incurable maniac, you will prefer your own life to hers. The galley is prepared—the plot is a good one—and' ——. Here the words of the speaker became inaudible, and they presently vanished behind a hut. I felt a throb like that of happiness in my bosom, when I reflected that this circumstance would enable me, not only to preserve my mistress, but perhaps have one more blissful moment in your company. I instantly climbed the wall that surrounds these gardens, with the hope of seeing you first, and disclosing what I had gleaned, before I sought the Empress, for so I must still call her. My hope is realized—and together let us seek her out, and offer our advice how to avoid this dangerous conspiracy."

He accordingly began to lead the way, but staggered, and, had it not been for the timely

assistance of his companion, must have fallen to the ground.

"Oh me! Camillus!" she cried, in a tone of alarm, "you are fainting—lean upon me!"

"I little deemed, a few months back, that I should need support from one of the soft sex," said he, smiling, "but grief works wonders!" With another effort, which made the cold drops trickle down his forehead, he placed his arm on hers—a thrill of extacy passed through his frame—his brain reeled; but he controuled the feeling, and walked slowly, with the being of his idolatry, into the house. They found Agrippina in an apartment adjoining the bath. She appeared to be in deep thought—an opened packet was upon the table, upon which her eyes were fixed, as they entered. She started at the sight of Camillus, and a momentary smile of pleasure crossed her face, which was

succeeded by an expression of anxiety, as she noticed the death-like paleness of his countenance, and the glassy appearance of his once sparkling eyes. "My poor Camillus!" she cried, extending her hand towards him, which he kneeling received, and kissed respectfully. "You are ill—very ill! Acerronia, love! hasten, and bid my physician come to me this moment! Lie down upon this couch—wait not for ceremony—alas! thou can'st not stand. Slave! bring some wine." Camillus, by a motion of his hand, prevented Acerronia from quitting the apartment, and having sipped some wine, pronounced himself sufficiently recovered to dispense with medical assistance for the present; and, with as much caution as possible, began to unfold the conversation he had overheard. When he had finished, Agrippina expressed no surprise at his narration; but, presenting the packet to Acerronia, requested her

to read its contents, which warned her not to persist in her intention of going to Baiæ by water."

"You see, madam!" said Acerronia, "that a plot is really formed to deprive us of you, by the foulest means. Let us prevail upon you then, to abandon the thought of exposing yourself to the threatened danger—trust not your person to the waves, for they conspire with men to work your ruin!"

With tears in his eyes Camillus threw himself at her feet, and joined his entreaties to those of Acerronia.

Agrippina, withdrawing her hand from her face, which she had placed there to conceal from them the agony of her mind,—at length answered them, with composure—"If it be true that Nero wishes me dead, and can so far forget the ties of nature, as to become himself the director of my murder—why should I put

off the fatal hour, which, struggle as I may, must come at last? But I will not think it posssible. I have done evil to many, but none towards him. At our last meeting, was he not kind as love could render him? I will trust him still—the only comfort I have left me is, to think he loves me. I am sinking beneath the weight of curses I cannot fling from me!—At night I see a host of shades rise up from Pluto's realms, and shake their shadowy hands in menace over me! Fathers made childless—children fatherless—matrons and virgins, come in spectral groups, and warn me of some punishment I have to bear hereafter! He is the only treasure saved from my wreck of glory—my cup of grief is well nigh full; but will not quite o'erflow while I can think he loves me.—I make you shudder, my poor orphan maid, to hear me speak thus. Turn not your eyes to earth—why should the innocent head be bent

downward? —guilt reads the ground, but virtue looks towards Heaven."

"My heart will break, if you talk thus to me."

"I am not worth thy sorrow; but, to assuage it, I promise that I will not embark to-morrow —I will proceed by land to Baiæ. And now it is time that Camillus should retire." At a signal given, her attendants entered the apartment, and conducted the page to his chamber, while Agrippina retired by another door, accompanied by Acerronia, who had become her constant bedfellow.

The following morning, the two friends departed, with a few attendants, for Baiæ. The road they had to travel lay through a variety of most exquisite scenery; vale, hill and rock, ocean and streamlet, met the view by turns. Sometimes they passed through fields where the luxuriant vine spread its rich store of grapes,

then wound through glens where the gigantic cliffs on either side betrayed the fresh springs to leap the deep abyss, and, scattering, fall like mist upon the green sward beneath. Sometimes they rested upon the top of some high hill, from whence they could behold the glorious mirror of heaven, glittering in the sunbeams, and adorned with light-winged barks that skimmed its surface like white birds. Then, as they again descended to some vale beneath, and by degrees lost sight of it, they turned their eyes above, and gazed upon the sea of space—of infinity—the ocean of eternity! Every thing above and around combined to make them happy, and care fled voluntarily from them during the delightful journey. As they passed through the town, the inhabitants strewed roses along the streets—garlands were flung to them from the windows, songs of welcome met them at every turn, senators and artizans, landlords and their tenants

all hailed the mother of Nero with applauding shouts, and followed the vehicle until it passed into the avenue of the private gardens of the Emperor, where another, and more gratifying reception awaited her. Her son, surrounded by his courtiers, stood upon the marble steps of a pavillion, with open arms to receive her; for he concealed the disappointment he felt at her arrival, by a well feigned affection. The beatings of her heart prevented her utterance, but descending from the chariot, she threw herself upon his neck and wept audibly. The day was passed in festivity and rejoicing, every tongue was fluent, every eye was bright, and every heart seemed happy. Nero prevailed upon his mother to accept of a vessel he had provided for her return, which she did the more willingly as no doubt now lingered in her mind of the perfect love and amity they entertained for each other.

CHAPTER XX.

"Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the North wind's breath,
And stars to set—but all
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, Oh! Death."

F. Hemans.

The night was mild and tranquil, and the crowded stars glittered with an unusual brightness. The first day of the festival had been one of universal merrymaking, and the numerous pleasure parties returning now from their delightful excursions to Misenum or from the opposite shores of Surrentum, Stabiæ and Pom-

peii, formed an animated picture to the beholders as they shot rapidly past each other, or paused for their companies to salute and send words of regard to absent friends, then separate again, and dart in opposite directions towards their several homes. Sounds of tinkling instruments issued, at times, from the light barks, as they swept by the flowery shores of Baiæ; and sometimes the soft voice of a young lover, breathing, in music, his passion to his mistress, who looked into the deep waters of the bay to hide the blushes that mantled upon her cheek. The laugh of mirth approached the shore upon the surface of the sea, at intervals, and the phosphoric element, ploughed by a thousand prows, left far behind them tracks of vivid fire, more beautiful to the eye than the lava-streams of Vesuvius, when she bids them flow, and fix the eyes of men with wonder. The light-hearted peasants, had not yet broken up the

rustic dance, or left the emerald banks of Baiæ, which hung over the waves, covered wtih shrubs and plants that sprung spontaneously from the fertile soil, when Agrippina, leaning upon the arm of her constant companion, left the villa to walk through the plantations to the galley, which was drawn up by a projecting rock, level with its deck, for her reception. For some time they walked in silence; at length they paused upon a terrace, which commanded an extensive view of the gulph, and Acerronia exclaimed, in a low tone. "Why are we not permitted to live as calm and quiet as this bay is now, from which each vessel has departed, and every breeze is slumbering upon a bed of moss or flowers.—How blissful would existence be, if this sweet quietude could last."

Agrippina made no reply, but turned her eyes towards Vesuvius, from the crater of which a faint smoke ascended, and striking her hand

upon her bosom, proceeded on her walk. The observations of her friend changed the current of her thoughts, and she became gloomy in a moment.

"You are not well," said Acerronia.

"Yes, yes, quite *well*, but not so tranquil at the heart as you would wish me, girl."

"I grieve to hear you say so. I thought this reconciliation with your son would have dismissed all care; and even now your looks bespoke a heart at rest. I pray you do not conjure phantoms up to disturb it. You should not be the only being dejected."

"Thou art gay at least, my love."

At this moment Nero came upon them by a different path, and the cheek of Acerronia was blanched with fear. A group of ladies followed, but remained at a distance when they saw him approach her.

"I have provided a galley for your reception,

which will convey you speedily to your own villa, my dear madam, where I intend shortly to visit you."

"Oh, Nero!" exclaimed his mother, affected even to tears, "you give me new life by this show of filial tenderness.

"I intend to give thee new life, madam. If," continued he, in a low tone, and turning aside, "if there be any truth in the Nazarite's creed, whom the sapient Tiberius would have made a god of."

"I believe thee—and cannot pardon myself for having listened, even for a moment, to those who would make me mistrustful of your love. I have been bewildered by them, but their influence is at an end. Never did mother love a son so fervently as I do; and never felt mother so happy as I now feel, in believing that love returned. Promise me, Nero! never again to heed the calumnies invented for my ruin.—

Think upon what I have already done for your aggrandizement, and turn a deaf ear to the malignant tales of false friends and unprincipled flatterers, by whom a Prince must ever be surrounded. My days of mad ambition are no more—the climax of my hopes was gained, when I beheld thee seated on the throne!—When shall I behold my son in my retirement? when will you come to cheer me with your presence?"

"Speedily, be assured."

"And shall the voice of envy or malignity never again disturb our mutual confidence?"

"After to-night, my honoured mother, never!—You are aware of the speedy punishment which overtook Silana and her accomplices; let that prove to you my conviction, that you are all a mother should be, and that they were every thing you taught me to believe. See! I have chosen you a gallant sailor

for your pilot—a man well skilled in the profession to which he is an honour. 'Tis Herculeus; you may possibly have seen him at Rome."

Acerronia, who had never quitted the side of her mistress, trembled so violently when she looked in the captain's face, that Agrippina was compelled to make an excuse for her agitation to Nero, attributing it to the evening air, and desiring her to wrap her mantle more closely round her; she then scanned with more attention the features of Herculeus. "If they are emblematical of his heart," thought she, "cruelty and cunning take up their abode there." His cheeks were sun-burnt, and his mouth, when speaking, formed itself into a malicious curve, that warned the listener to beware of the words which fell from it. A stoop, contracted from servility, forbade the approach of confidence, and Agrippina fancied

she heard a voice, repeating in her ear the warnings she received at Bauli; but, turning to her son, the calm serenity of his countenance banished them from her recollection. "So quiet a night as this," said she, "will not permit the gentleman to give me a proof of his abilities."

"On the contrary, madam, you will be astonished when you perceive how his talents exhibit themselves, even in so calm a night as this. I trust he will give me reason to applaud his skill; if he do not, he is an idle boaster, and shall never steer your bark again, or any other in the Roman service."

The eyes of Acerronia at this moment encountered those of Nero, but instantly sought the earth at the expression of his, and she pressed the arm of her lady with a convulsive force.

"Are you ill, child?" she enquired.

All eyes were turned upon the poor girl, as she requested her mistress to walk alone with her for a few moments. Her faltering voice and trembling form alarmed Agrippina, who immediately complied with her request; and Nero, darting a fierce look at the sufferer, joined his train, and struck into an opposite path.—Herculeus was, however, the favourite of the hour, for the conversation was entirely directed to him, and he spoke in so low a voice that curiosity vainly endeavoured to overhear a syllable of their conference. When the sound of the party's footsteps was lost, Acerronia fell upon her knees at the feet of Agrippina. "Dear mistress," she cried, "I cannot controul the dreadful forebodings of my heart—do not, I implore you, go by water to your villa—some evil is at hand! There is a mist before my eyes; but in it I perceive, as in a mirror, scenes of distress and danger! All is confu-

sion; but, so strong is the sensation of fear I now feel—so powerful is the impression I have received, that there is some fearful treachery at hand—that I beseech you not to treat this second warning lightly—go not on board the galley this night."

"Rise, rise! my sweet companion—rise, I entreat you. Why should you thus give way to thoughts which torment you, without a show of reason for their intrusion? Am I not completely reconciled to my son? Has he not been attentive and affectionate? Come, dry those eyes, and dismiss your childish fears."

"They are not childish—they are not without foundation. I have watched, and judged—marked every look,—and seen his base soul through its deceitful window, the quick shifting eye. Beware of his smiles!

"I must not—cannot—will not, think him

false! The love I have borne him from his infancy—the good I have done him in his maturer years—are things he cannot forget! For personal danger I have none to fear, and, from the envy of my foes, still less; for he has already launched a bolt at them, which will caution them in future."

"Did you observe the features of that man, the captain of the galley, with whom you must embark? I never saw a face so full of guilt—it made me shudder."

"Why, I must needs agree with you as to his appearance; but in rude caskets costly gems are often hid. I like him not; but since he possesses the friendship of my son, I must endure his presence. Oh! if you had felt how strongly Nero pressed me in his arms, you would no longer think of treachery. Come, discard that look of fatal prophecy, and be gay.

Consider, all eyes will be upon you, and all tongues will be employed in talking of you, if you attract their notice by being melancholy, where all appear so merry. Remember, I am only repeating the advice you gave me, but a short time since. Hark! they approach us—clear up your countenance."

At this moment the gay crowd joined them. Nero, advancing, threw his arms round the neck of his mother, and, in a tone of kindness, enquired "If her young friend had recovered from her nervous attack?" He sent a withering glance at Acerronia, as he concluded the sentence, which was unnoticed by Agrippina, who assured him she was much better than when he left them. "Will she not let me hear that pleasing intelligence from her own lips?" said he, as he walked to the side of the trembling girl.

"Oh, much better—much better!"—she

faltered, as she took the opposite arm of Agrippina, to avoid him.

"I perceive you are," said Nero, "and the sea breeze will completely restore your tranquillity. So, madam, you will perhaps permit me to escort you to the galley—look where she rides—I am strongly tempted to accompany you; but you see how many urgent motives I have to recall me to the banquet."

He pointed to his train of courtiers as he spoke, and Agrippina, bowing an assent to his remark, proceeded to the vessel.

"You will not take many of your attendants with you, I presume."

"None but Crepereius Gallus, and my favourite here. There is no room for state on board, and that is a thing I am always anxious to dispense with."

"I applaud your resolution—followers are sad incumbrances."

By this time, they had reached the water's edge. She bade an affectionate farewell to her son, which he returned with seeming warmth. The vessel was cast off from her moorings—the men plied their oars swiftly, and they soon lost sight of Nero and his companions, who, after standing for a few minutes on the beach, returned to carouse within the palace. All was quietude around, every sail had vanished from the bay, and Agrippina, seated on the poop of the galley, with Acerronia by her side, frequently commanded the rowers to pause, that she might enjoy more fully the softness and sublimity of the scene.—Those who have never felt the exquisite sensation which arises in the heart, created by unclouded skies, calm waters, dark woods and giant hills, midnight the hour, the host of heaven glittering above, and holy silence reigning serene below,—have yet a joy to come, which will surpass all they

have hitherto known. It is in such a scene the soul takes her loftiest flight, and the dark shadows of grief are lost in the mild light of contemplation.

"Acerronia, love! bring the lute which lies upon the table in the cabin, and play me some air that will accord with the awful and delightful sensations created by this lovely scene."

As she spoke the men rested upon their oars, and the dripping water fell like silver beads from their broad blades into the depths beneath. Acerronia returned immediately, and, inspired by the solemnity of the scene, sang the following mournful prophecy of her unhappy fate:—

'I am speeding to the region, where my father's spirit roams,
With the warlike and the beautiful, in their eternal homes;
He hath flitted on before me from this world of grief and tears,
But dower'd me with hope that I may die in early years:
My form may scorch on funeral pyre, or waste in ocean's cells,
But I'm speeding to the region where my father's spirit dwells.

My mother died when I was young, and all around was bright;
But left upon my heart and mind an everlasting blight:
And now I seek more anxiously the gloomy realm of shades,
Than e'er I sought, in infancy, Lucania's golden glades:
That sunny land will ne'er again delight me with its charms,
I'm speeding to eternity, and to my mother's arms.

"You have made me sad again," exclaimed Agrippina, as she finished the song. "Captain! let the men put their strength to the oars. Come to the cabin with me, Acerronia! I will lie down awhile, and you shall rest beside me. Good Crepereius, keep thou in the steerage—I may have orders for thee. Captain, good night!"

As they retired from the deck, a light breeze set in from the sea, bringing with it a host of clouds, which completely obscured the stars, and spread a darkness over all the surrounding objects. Herculeus, no sooner perceived his illustrious charge retire with her attendants, than he commanded the first bank of rowers to

quit their occupation, and follow his example. He then took up several coils of rope, the ends of which had previously been fastened to the stanchions of the state cabin that supported the poop deck, which was heavily laden with plates of lead; as they had been previously sawn across, it required but a slight force to pull them down, and with them the immense weight which they supported. Thus, while the devoted victims within were conversing, unconscious of danger, some twenty mariners were only waiting for the word of command, to annihilate them in a moment. Agrippina had thrown aside her outward garment, which she wore upon deck to screen herself from the night air—her companion had done the same—and Crepereius Gallus stretched himself upon a couch, near the door of the cabin,—when they heard the bustle upon deck, created by the rowers who had quitted their seats at the call of

Herculeus: presently all was silent, save the sound of the oars as they dipped in the waves, and urged the vessel forward. Agrippina threw herself upon the bed, and her companion, kneeling at the foot of it, was breathing a prayer to the deities of night for their safety,—when the deck above them fell into the cabin, crushing every thing in pieces, tearing away the side of the galley, and exposing to the distracted creatures the deep sea, which poured in fast upon them! Fortunately, the bed-posts were of such solidity and strength, that they bore up that part of the deck immediately above them, and saved them from the death which instantly overtook the unfortunate Crepercius! The tumult was bewildering—oaths and execrations rent the air. Those who were not in the secret endeavoured to save the vessel, from the destruction which the instruments of Nero endeavoured to effect, and frustrated their attempts

by every means in their power. Acerronia, whose fears were ever on the alert, instantly perceived the cause of their distress. The sailors, in the confidence of Herculeus, rushed to the side of the vessel which was left open, and endeavoured to upset her; and foremost in the attempt was Herculeus, animating them by his example. A shriek from Acerronia caused him to run towards the cabin, purposing, by a blow, to finish the business for which he was hired; but, seeing a female pass by him, he paused. "Save me! save me!" she cried—"if you have pity, save the Emperor's mother!" He pursued her through the darkness, unable to distinguish her features, and in a moment plunged his fatal poniard into the innocent breast of Acerronia! "Sweet mistress!" she feebly cried, as she expired—"I die for thee! and may the gods preserve ——" She died before her prayer could be uttered! and the

disappointed ruffian quitted the body, to seek for loftier prey. He was foiled!

On the commencement of the tumult, Agrippina endeavoured to keep her favourite near her (for the moment the truth flashed upon her mind, she resolved to save her mistress' life by stratagem, at the sacrifice of her own.)—Agrippina clasped her in her arms, with a strength which could not be conquered but by the efforts of despair—she implored—she commanded in vain—two thoughts alone possessed the mind of her faithful friend—the danger of her mistress, and the means of saving her.

"See, my dear mistress," she exclaimed, "a plank floats by the stern of the galley, a struggle will enable you to reach it; plunge for your poor girl's sake. Oh, gods! the murderer comes this way. I will prevent his noticing your escape—attempt not to keep me back—they seek not my life—free me from your grasp—farewell! farewell for ever!"

With a bound she disengaged herself from Agrippina, who followed her until she fell beneath the ruffian's weapon, and then with a deep groan plunged into the water, and reached the plank pointed out to her by Acerronia.

The uproar on board the galley alarmed some fishermen, who, by their alacrity, saved the crew; (Herculeus and his myrmidons having deserted the wreck before their approach, in a boat kept in readiness for their escape.) At length, the cries of Agrippina brought them to her succour. Thus miraculously preserved, she desired the men to make instantly for her villa up the Lucrine Lake, promising to enrich them all, if she arrived in safety; and the men, in hopes of receiving the promised reward, pulled vigorously towards it. They had not proceeded far, when she was roused from a reverie into which she had fallen, by the sound of oars behind them, which became more distinct

every moment, and, turning her head, she beheld a small boat, pulled by a single man. It gained upon them rapidly, for the boat in which Agrippina was seated was not built for swiftness:—in a few minutes the stranger passed by them, almost within oars' length; and she fancied she saw the body of a female, lying at the bottom of the boat. She desired the fishermen to hail—they did so frequently, but no answer was returned; and, in a short time, the strangers were out of sight. Her heart throbbed violently, as she beheld them pass. Could it be Acerronia, whom she saw lying in that small boat—had she indeed escaped the murderer's knife? She breathed a silent prayer that it might be so, and in a short time she was once more within the walls of her own villa.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Who, Nero! so depraved, if choice were free,
To hesitate 'twixt Seneca and thee?
Whose crimes, so much have they all crimes outgone,
Deserve more serpents, apes, and sacks than one.
Not so, thou say'st; there are, whom I could name,
As deep in guilt, and as accurs'd in fame;
Orestes slew *his* mother. True; but know,
The same effects from different causes flow;
A father, murder'd at the social board,
And Heaven's command, unsheathed his righteous sword.
Besides, Orestes in his wildest mood,
Poison'd no cousin, shed no consort's blood,
Buried no poniard in a sister's throat,
Sung on no public stage, *no Troics wrote!*"

Juvenal Satire, 8th To Ponticus.
Gifford trans.

THE revel was at its height in the palace of the Emperor, the guests were mad with wine, music resounded through the spacious apartment and groups of light-robed eastern slaves, with silver bells upon their arms and feet, danced

before them, delighting the company with the perfect symmetry of their forms and the grace of their ever-varying positions. Nero, whose couch was raised above the rest, was crowned with a wreath of ivy; his cup-bearer (a beautiful boy) had another of grapes mingled with his luxuriant hair, which flowed down his shoulders in polished ringlets. Cup after cup he filled, and placed in his lord's hand, who drained them successively, until his brain reeled with the potent beverage: jest followed jest, and peals of laughter burst from his lips, and his eyes shot forth an unnatural light as they glanced, from time to time, to the lower end of the apartment, as if anxiously expecting some messenger with important news. Not a moment did he relax from the unnatural excitement into which he had worked himself; the cup, the jest and laugh were by turns for ever upon his lips; his flushed cheek and flashing eyes gave an un-

earthly wildness to his words, and caused the hearts of all to quake with fear, even while they laughed in compliment to his humour.

"Fill, fill," he cried, "and let your goblets overflow—the Emperor drinks a health—health to the souls of the departed!—Mother, thou wilt hear that in Hades," he muttered to himself, as he gave his goblet to be replenished. At the same moment, a page handed to him a sealed packet, the direction of which he had no sooner read, than a violent trembling seized upon him, his face turned deadly pale, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, his hair bristled on his head, his tongue adhered to his palate, and every faculty seemed upon a sudden to be rendered useless. The guests were filled with wonder and consternation at the sudden change, and sat motionless for some minutes. At length, seeing that his abstraction continued, they arose to depart; the movement recalled his senses,

and starting up, he motioned them to remain. They reseated themselves, in obedience to his will, while he tore open the packet and glanced hastily over the contents, his features undergoing the several expressions of terror, disappointment, rage and wonder: having finished the perusal, he handed it to Burrhus, who was seated upon his right hand, who, after a slight expression of surprise, read it attentively, and rising, suggested that the affair required immediate consideration. The words were scarcely uttered when Herculeus, the captain of the galley, appeared at the door, breathless with haste and covered with dust.

"Ah, traitor!" cried the infuriated Nero, as he sprang from his couch, and fastened upon his throat, with a grasp which nearly strangled him, "thou hast escaped from one element but shall not from the other; I'll have thee, dog, impaled alive, and roasted for a public spectacle

—guards, take this traitor, and tear out his tongue, lest he should prate of things forbidden —let him not speak, away with him at once."

At the instigation of Burrhus, however, the captive was liberated, and summoned to attend the Emperor in his private closet, there to give an account of that which could not be breathed before the astonished guests. Nero led the way to his closet, after dispatching a slave to find out Seneca, where we will leave him, and return to Agrippina, who so miraculously escaped from the wreck. On arriving at her villa, she resolved at once to be the first to send news of her safety to her son, without giving him reason to think she believed him to be accessary to the conspiracy, but spoke of it as a thing of chance. It was this letter (despatched by a faithful freedman upon the swiftest horse in the stables) that caused the surprise and terror of the Emperor, which we have just narrated.

The torment she endured, after forwarding the letter, was felt in different ways by her domestics; but in the midst of her own calamity, she did not forget her long-cherished and ill-fated companion. Finding she was not at the villa, when she arrived, she dismissed the hope of her having escaped, and with a heart fraught with affection and eyes dropping tears, she visited the private closet of her friend, where, upon looking over some papers, she was surprised to find a will, which, having read, she sealed with her own signet, and deposited with her own papers of value. During this mournful ceremony, however, she was continually giving orders to the slaves and countermanding them. Scarcely had one messenger departed, than she ordered another to overtake and bring him back again, and before the horse could be led from the stables her resolution was changed. She was no longer the absolute matron, whose

will was unalterable—she fluctuated between hope and fear. She knew not whether to remain where she was, or fly into some distant province; her mind was a chaos, and her terrors lacerated her heart as vultures do their prey.—She feared to move from her apartment, lest emissaries should be posted in the antirooms to take away her life. Often did she endeavour to convince herself that her son was guiltless, and as often did circumstances arise to her memory that defeated her hopes. At length, wearied with agitation, she retired to rest.

The night was dark and stormy, and the wind moaned dismally through the branches of the tall pines and cedars that surrounded the villa. It was about the twelfth hour when some of the domestics were surprised to hear the galloping of horses in the avenue. They thought it was the messenger returned from the mission upon which their mistress had despatched him, and

were hastening to the door, when a loud knocking at the principal entrance, and the sound of many voices startled them. The door however was opened, and a party of soldiers instantly entered, and seizing upon the slaves and all persons within, threatened them with instant death if they attempted to cry out or resist; while three men, muffled in large riding cloaks and deeply slouched hats, which entirely concealed their features, proceeded towards the chamber of Agrippina. For a few moments there was a dreadful calm, like that which precedes an earthquake. They heard the door of their mistress's apartment broken open, then a wild shriek of terror from the attendant who slept in her lady's chamber, and who rushing into the midst of the group fell senseless upon the ground. There was another dreadful pause—and then the three men returned from the room, and gave orders for the domestics to be released,

which being obeyed, the party quitted the house, vaulted into their saddles, and putting their horses to full speed, galloped away through the same avenue by which they entered. The women flocked to the apartment of Agrippina,—the illustrious inmate was *no more*.

The following morning, the remains of Agrippina were burnt, the heart and ashes were placed in separate urns, and conveyed by her faithful freed man Mnester to their last home. She who was the dread of nations, whose death was eagerly desired by the great, was, at least, mourned by thousands of the humble who partook of her munificence. She received the spontaneous tribute of gratitude from many a heart, and tho' no costly monument was raised above her ashes, wild flowers, washed with tears, were daily strewed upon them by the simple villagers,

who shared her bounty while living, and wept over her when dead.

Mnester, the faithful Mnester could not survive her loss, and, as the last dust was heaped upon her urn, flung himself upon his sword, breathing her name as he expired upon her grave.

The ceremony finished, her weeping domestics returned by a contrary path to that which they had chosen on their way to the celebrated spot of her interment; and, upon the summit of a hill beheld the figure of a human being extended dead upon the earth. It was the faithful Camillus! Upon approaching nearer, they observed a block of marble, upon which was deeply carved

"*Acerronia.—Fidelis ad urnam.*"

For many years the peasantry visited the graves of Agrippina and her ill-fated friend;

and when the blot of human nature, the sensual and despicable wretch, the parricide and despot met with the just punishment of his countless vices; a simple monument was erected to mark the spot where was deposited all that remained of the renowned but ill-famed

Agrippina Augusta
The Descendant of Augustus!
The Sister of Caligula!!
The Wife of Claudius!!!
And the Mother of Nero!!!!

FINIS.

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